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MISSISSIPPI HEADWATERS RESERVOIRS
ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEWS, SERIES II

DAWC 37-87-H-1509

DAWC 37-88-H-0644

Submitted to
John Anfinson
Environmental Resources
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
St. Paul District

June 1988

by Jo Blatti
HISTORY AFIELD

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FINAL REPORT
MISSISSIPPI HEADWATERS RESERVOIRS
ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEWS, SERIES II

DAWC 37-87-M-1509
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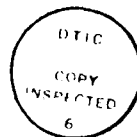
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Management summary

This report, Mississippi Headwaters Oral History Interviews (Series II) contains analysis and full transcripts of eight (8) interviews. The subject of the interviews is 20th century history and operations of Corps of Engineers damsites and recreation facilities at Winnibigoshish, Sandy, Leech, Pokegama and Gull Lakes in north central Minnesota. The time frame spans the 1930s to 1980s. The work was conducted under contracts DAWC 37-87-M-1509 and DAWC 37-88-M-0644 at a budget of \$7,042.92. This study is in partial fulfillment of ER 870-1-1, requiring selective oral history documentation of field operating activities within each Corps District.

The Series II Headwaters interviews, undertaken in the winter of 1987-88, were commissioned to complete and to supplement an earlier set of interviews conducted with retired damtenders in 1986-87. Topics for investigation included: dam operations, use of dwellings and outbuildings, recreational and resort facilities, wild rice culture, wild life habitat, Corps policies and native American relations in the area.

Informants in Series II include retired St. Paul District personnel and residents of the Federal Dam community as well as retired damtenders. Fieldwork was conducted in the winter of 1987-88; project narrators were interviewed at homes and offices in the Headwaters and the metropolitan Twin Cities area. Verbatim transcripts were prepared for all project interviews.



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The Series II interviews yielded considerable information about Headwaters operations from the 1930s through the 1980s. The information falls into several general categories: descriptions of work processes and living conditions; explanations of special problems or incidents; opinions and interpretations concerning Corps policies and practices. Though few differences of fact or recollection appear in the interviews, differences in emphasis and interpretation abound; this range of perspectives is generally considered a positive value in oral history documentation.

The study's significance lies in the project narrators' abilities to lend fuller explanation, subtlety and contextual shading to events and processes noted, often without amplification, in the Corps Annual Reports and special reports. Its chief limitation is the selectivity of human memory. However, it is important to note that what is remembered in these interviews follows exceedingly closely upon accounts found in written sources and other interviews. Little in the way of noticeable inaccuracies occurs when narrators' recollections are checked against Annual Reports, for instance.

Principal conclusions and recommendations are as follows:

- 1) No further special initiatives are recommended regarding oral history documentation of the Headwaters operations, 1930s - 1980s.
- 2) An on-going program of selective "exit" interviews with retiring employees is suggested as a method for picking up additional perspectives on Headwaters operations.
- 3) Development of a policy concerning "narrator review" is recommended to the Corps, along with suggestions as to why and how this might be done. Note: narrator review is the practice of returning oral history transcripts to interviewees for final approval. The narrator's review may include annotations, corrections, deletions, and restrictions upon use.

The repository for records for this project is the Historical Committee Office, St. Paul District, Corps of Engineers. The contractor has recommended that full copies of the final project report be sent to Library and Collections of the Minnesota History Society in St. Paul and the North Central Minnesota Historical Center at Bemidji State University, as well.

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Introduction

This report documents oral history field research conducted for the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers, December 1987 - January 1988. The general subject of these interviews is the history and operation of Corps dam sites at the Mississippi Headwaters Reservoirs in north central Minnesota from the 1930s to the present. Individual subthemes concerning the reservoirs include recreational facilities and resorts (both civilian and Corps), wild rice, native American relations, daily operations at dam sites and Corps institutional history. The Headwaters Reservoirs system include facilities at Leech, Pine River, Pokegama, Sandy, Gull, Winnibogoshish.

This work is a sequel to earlier interviews conducted in 1986.

Persons interviewed in the Series II project were:

Carl Anderson

retired 1958; damtender at Gull Lake ca. 1934-1937, at Pokegama 1937-1958

Warren Bridge

retired 1986; operator of Bridges Launch Service in Federal Dam, 1936-1986

Merton Lego

Federal Dam businessman, also active in Leech Lake tribal affairs

Jim Ruyak

area manager Headwaters regional office, Remer MN, 1979 -

Irv Seelye

retired 1987; damtender Winnibogoshish, 1958-1987

Lee Staley

operator Wescott's Launch Service, Federal Dam MN, ca. 1973 -

James von Lorenz

retired 1972; worked on construction out of St. Paul District Office 1930s - 1972

Wesley Walters

retired 1965; civilian engineer in St. Paul District Office,
1930-1965; responsible for Headwaters operations, 1932-1950.

This report is divided into the following sections:

- overview
- research design
- summary Series II findings
- notes on the pilot and Series II interviews
- recommendations and conclusion
- appendix A, containing full transcripts plus tape indexes,
summaries and interview schedule
- appendix B, containing scope of work, project correspondence
and resumes

A popular report is in preparation under separate cover.

Overview

The Headwaters Reservoirs

The Corps of Engineers initially dammed the natural reservoirs system formed by Leech Lake, Winnibigoshish, Pine River, and Sandy in the years 1881-1891. In a second round of construction between 1899 and 1909, much of the original timber work in the dams was replaced with concrete. Gull Lake reservoir was completed in 1912. The dam complexes included housing, officers quarters, and work buildings of various sorts. Few structural changes to the dams have been made since, though some elements in the surrounding area have changed considerably in the intervening years.

The Headwaters region of Minnesota was a relatively remote region when the Corps came in to construct the dams. Surfaced roads were bad to non-existent. The railroads hadn't arrived yet. The population was clustered in widely spaced market towns, lumber camps and native American communities, on and off the Leech Lake reservation. Much of the area was, and still is, public land held in state and federal forests and in trust for Indian people.

The railroad came into the Headwaters area in 1910, greatly facilitating local travel for year-round residents and long-distance forays by tourists who visited via regularly scheduled fishing and camping excursions. Another small freshet of newcomers came into the area after 1914, when homesteading opened up in the cut-over timber district.

Over the years, a summer tourist season based on boating, fishing, hunting and camping has become a mainstay of the regional economy. The automobile and vacation benefits have placed once-elite wilderness

journeys within popular reach. Many of the resorts and guide services in the Headwaters region are in the immediate vicinity of the Corps reservoirs.

At the time it was built, the Headwaters reservoir system was intended to serve as an aid to navigation on the Mississippi River and to maintenance of waterflow into the milling and manufacturing district of Minneapolis. In time, the uses of the reservoir system changed. By the turn of the century, the logging industry in northern Minnesota was the interest most actively assisted by Corps water discharge policies in the Headwaters region. Following the construction of the 9-foot channel, which turned the Mississippi into a slackwater canal between Minneapolis, Minnesota and St. Louis, Missouri, in the 1930s, supplemental flow from the reservoirs system was no longer a primary tool in maintaining the upper Mississippi River water levels. Operations guidelines were keyed to the needs of resort owners, summer visitors and other local conditions such as wild rice culture and wildlife habitat at the individual lakes during the 1930s.

In the years following World War II, the Corps itself got into the recreation business, under authority of the River and Harbors Act of 1944. Initially, these facilities took the form of primitive camping areas and limed latrines. By the 1980s, the Corps campgrounds featured hook-ups for recreational vehicles (RVs), washing facilities and other comforts.

The Job of Dam-tending

Civilian damtenders maintained the Headwaters reservoirs for the Corps of Engineers. Generally, these men and their families were year-round residents at the dam sites. Damtenders were "on call" 24 hours a day until well into the 20th century. The basic requirements of the job

were to monitor water discharge levels at the dams and to adjust those levels per the instructions of the St. Paul Operations staff. The damtenders kept daily logbooks and performed all actions necessary to regular operations and maintenance; they were also responsible for repairs and alterations to the dam facilities, insofar as those could be accomplished on-site with local labor and know-how. In the early years, the job also included hospitality to visiting officers on inspection - and sometimes pleasure-trips in the area.

Historically, the physical premises under the care of Corps employees in the Headwaters have included the dams themselves, gage houses, dwellings, officers quarters, boathouses, blacksmith and carpentry shops, barns, chicken coops, root cellars and, most recently, campgrounds and visitors facilities. The original domestic-work complexes were constructed in the 1880s and rebuilt when the dams were altered in the 1910s. These homes and outbuildings were based on simple, common, comfortable and middle-class shelter plans of the time. Telephone lines were installed in 1905 (Zellie, 1987, p. 15), electricity in the 1920s (op.cit., p. 36). Taken altogether, the outbuildings and the communication systems suggest highly self-sufficient food, transportation, and repair capabilities plus access to relatively scarce amenities in a remote rural area.

The job of damtending and the physical premises at the dams remained relatively constant from the 1880s to about 1950. At that point, a round of changes began. The officers' quarters, barns, workshops, and other outbuildings were moved off-site. The workshops were replaced with modern maintenance buildings combining office and repair space; the officers' quarters, horse barns and much of the "domestic farming" apparatus were no longer necessary in the age of

automobiles and supermarkets. The dam gages and gates were mechanized in the 1950s and 1960s, and the "first generation" picnic areas and campgrounds were constructed then, too.

In the years since, the job of dam-tending has been redefined as park or project management. Corps employees, now on a 40-hour week plus overtime, have moved off-site to private homes. Many construction and maintenance operations are now handled through contracted labor rather than Corps payroll.

Historical issues/themes

Four broad areas of historical inquiry arise from this sketch of the Headwaters dam facilities. The first is U.S. government - supported development of "internal improvements" for navigation and commercial purposes. Corps projects have occupied a central role in this intersection of national policy and local business interests throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. Transportation and logging companies operating in north central Minnesota and the milling - manufacturing district of Minneapolis, specifically, have benefited from Mississippi reservoirs operations at various points in the collective history of dams.

Second is development of the resort and recreation industry in the area from approximately 1910 to the present. The Corps of Engineers' entry into recreational facilities following World War II took place in the context of a 100-year history of wilderness protection nationally, two generations of commercial resort development and vacation - home building in northern Minnesota plus public works development of park facilities in the 1930s.

The third theme also stretches back to initial construction of the reservoir system in the 1880s: that is the intersection of native American history and treaty rights with the activities of other government bodies. In the case of the Leech Lake Chippewa and the Corps of Engineers in the Headwaters region, this intersection has involved flowage rights, timbering, wild rice culture and the preservation and protection of burial mounds and other cultural concerns.

Fourth, there is the institutional history of Corps of Engineers operations in the Headwaters project. This involves matters such as: the Corps presence as a large, national, bureaucratic institution among a group of dispersed rural communities; the Headwaters reservoirs as duty stations; policy formulation and implementation regarding operation of the dams; civilian and military status within the Corps of Engineers.

Previous oral history in the Headwaters

The Series II Headwaters interview project is a sequel to pilot oral histories commissioned by the Corps of Engineers in 1986-87. This work was accomplished under the terms of DACW37-86-M-1722, HISTORY AFIELD contractors.

The focus of the pilot interviews was the development of recreational facilities at the Headwaters dams, with special attention to the role of damtenders.

Four retired damtenders were interviewed in the pilot project:

Edmund Fitzpatrick

Retired 1973 as area manager Headwaters region; formerly
damtender at Cross and Gull Lake

Orin (Ole) Henderson

Retired 1975; damtender at Leech Lake 1959-1975

Russell (Ike) Kolb

Retired 1970; damtender at Sandy Lake 1947-1970

Edward Sunde

Retired 1985; parks manager at Leech Lake 1975-1985, formerly maintenance and assistant at Cross/Gull Lake.

Leroy Campbell, on staff at Leech Lake in maintenance (1962-), Betty (Mrs. Russell) Kolb and Agnes (Mrs. Orin) Henderson were interviewed in the pilot series as well.

Full transcripts and analysis of the pilot interviews are to be found in PHASE II FINAL REPORT MISSISSIPPI HEADWATERS RESERVOIRS ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEWS PILOT PROJECT DACW-37-86-M-1722 and the accompanying analysis.

To summarize briefly, the pilot interviews supplied

...human dimensions of change in work and living conditions as the new facilities were built and a larger public entered the Headwaters region.

Taken along with the written sources, the picture [that] emerges from the Headwaters pilot interviews is one of substantial change over a 30-year period. Damtenders who began their tenure reading gages and solving mechanical problems in fairly isolated rural settings following World War II ended their careers in the 1970s as park managers in people-centered recreation facilities. (Blatti, 1987, p. 3)

The individual interviews uncovered a range of attitudes and perspectives concerning these developments.

Series II Research Design

The Series II oral histories are based closely upon the data collected and recommendations outlined in the Headwaters pilot project report. The general purposes of the additional interviews were:

- 1) to complete (or more nearly complete) the recording of retired damtenders' recollections
- 2) to supplement damtender interviews with those of Corps employees (past or present) with differing responsibilities/perspectives on the Headwaters facilities. Possible informants in this area ranged from retired and active duty supervisory personnel to park rangers.

- 3) to venture outside the Corps of Engineers staff for community perspectives/impressions of Headwaters operations. Members of the resort community and the Leech Lake band (Chippewa) were stipulated as possible narrators.

These persons were identified as potential interview candidates:

Henry L. Sharp, retired damtender Pokegama

Irvin Seeley, retiring damtender Winnibigoshish

J. Wesley Walters, retired, Operations, St. Paul District Office

Owen Emsweiler, retired, St. Paul District Office

Jim von Lorenz, retired, Construction, St. Paul District Office

Jim Ruyak, area manager, Headwaters 1979-

Dennis Cin, Operations, St. Paul District Office

Walter Hermerding, project manager, Gull Lake 197 -

Harold and Warren Bridge, concession operations, Leech Lake Dam,
1930s - 1980s

Hartley White, tribal chair Leech Lake band

Additional narrators from the Indian and/or resort community
to be determined.

The Series II scope of work called for a total of 6 interviews with Corps of Engineers personnel (past or present) and two non-Corps individuals familiar with the Headwaters project. Final selection of interview narrators was made in consultation with Environmental Resources staff at the St. Paul District office.

As was to be expected, there were constraints upon our choices. Mr. Sharp, travelling in the Southwest United States, proved unavailable during the research period; Mr. Emsweiler is believed to be deceased. There were new opportunities as well. Mr. Anderson was located through Series II narrators early in the fieldwork. Mr. Lego was suggested by Leech Lake tribal officials when Mr. White's business travel prevented participation.

Eight interviews, totalling 11 hours, 5 minutes, were collected in the course of the project. As noted earlier, Series II narrators were:

Carl Anderson, retired damtender

Warren Bridge, retired concession operator, Federal Dam

Merton Lego, Federal Dam businessman

Jim Ruyak, area manager Headwaters

Irv Seelye, retiring damtender

Lee Staley, concession operator, Federal Dam

James von Lorenz, retired, construction, St. Paul District office

Wesley Walters, retired civilian engineer, St. Paul District.

(Note: a budget addendum permitted inclusion of the Anderson interview; it seemed unwise to defer documentation of a highly recommended 92-year old informant.)

Fieldwork was conducted during December 1987 and February 1988. Wesley Walters, James von Lorenz and Carl Anderson were interviewed in their homes in the metropolitan Twin Cities area. Warren Bridge, Merton Lego, Jim Ruyak, Irv Seelye and Lee Staley were interviewed in the Headwaters, December 12-16, 1987. The basic interview schedule developed for the Headwaters pilot project was adapted as necessary for Series II interviews. That interview schedule [appended] includes sections of inquiry concerning general biographical information, Corps (Headwaters) entry, experience as a damtender (engineer/construction foreman/area manager/ concessionaire/community member), water resources and recreation, development of recreation facilities, and native American relations. Though no new questions were developed, special care was taken to follow up on post World War II changes in the dam site complexes; this was done in support of National Register work

commissioned by the St. Paul District in 1987-88. As was noted in the pilot report, an interview schedule should be thought of as outline or map for exploration in oral history interviews, not a checklist.

Summary Series II Interview Findings

The following precis summarize major points and cross references among the interviews conducted for the Series II project. Generally speaking, these interviews provide information about the following matters:

- pre-World War II damtenders responsibilities and conditions of employment
- physical characteristics of the dams, dwellings and outbuildings at the government complexes 1930s - 1980s
- development and operation of resort and concession facilities 1930s - 1980s
- water levels issues, particularly in relation to wild rice culture and vacation cabins/homes
- the addition of public recreation responsibilities to the Corps long-standing role in water resources management
- relations between Headwaters-based and St. Paul-based Corps personnel.

Much of the material gathered in Series II interviews concerns Leech, Winnibigoshish and Pokegama Dam facilities, specifically, though systemwide comparisons and references occur, as well. Readers are referred to the appended transcripts and indexes for fullest consideration of the data.

The Corps

I. Carl Anderson

After the war [World War I]...I had several types of work, among which was editor of the Braham Journal, teaching school in Wyoming and being out of work in Minneapolis. It was toward the later part of the...'20s that I...thought perhaps the best thing I could do was to go back into government service of some kind...

(CA p. 1)

Due in part to his status as a veteran of World War I, Mr.

Anderson got a job with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, working as an

inspector on lock and dam no. 1 in Minneapolis. Continued work on the 9-foot channel led to a damtending position at the Headwaters Reservoirs, first at Gull Lake and then at Pokegama through the 1950s (CA pp. 1-3).

Mr. Anderson is the first of several informants in the Series II interviews to note the importance of government employment in the hard times of the late 1920s and 1930s (CA pp. 11-12); Wesley Walters and James von Lorenz make the same general point in discussing their careers with the Corps of Engineers.

Carl Anderson's account of Gull Lake and Pokegama damtending is significant on several accounts. At 92 the most senior of all the Headwaters narrators, Anderson is the only damtender to have actually participated in the service to visiting officers discussed in all the pilot interviews. In fact, Anderson locates change in policy concerning officers' vacation visits to Mrs. Anderson's refusal to do personal laundry for a major and his wife in the late 1930s (CA p. 3). Anderson also provides clear and detailed descriptions of various repair projects at Pokegama in the 1930s and 1940s, including his actions in the Blandin papermill dam break (CA pp. 8-9, 19-20, 21-23). He describes his responsibility for Leech Lake dam during World War II, low water levels during the 1930s, work with Ball Club Indians on wild rice culture below Federal Dam in the 1940s (CA pp. 14-15, 6, 25-28).

Mr. Anderson's comments on several matters resonate with the observations of other narrators. He and Warren Bridge describe the same floating bog incident circa WWII from their individual perspectives (CA pp. 14-15). (Note: Ole Henderson and Leroy Campbell describe that general bog condition in some detail in the pilot series.) Anderson's comments about Corps work with water levels for wild rice culture and fish spawning in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s (CA pp. 25-28, 42-44)

parallel Jim Ruyak's discussion of the same issues in the 1970s and 1980s, suggesting the persistence of these concerns, if not any tidy resolution. Finally, Mr. Anderson's comparison of salary and "subsistence" arrangements at Gull Lake and Pokegama provides a useful picture of part-time and fulltime damtending, respectively (CA pp. 3, 9-10).

II. Wesley Walters

They [resort and cabin owners] were always complaining about low water or high water and so on.

(WW p. 14)

As chief of operations for the Headwaters Reservoirs from 1932 through the 1950s, Mr. Walters spent much of his time in the area on inspection trips and in public hearings. His interview contains numerous anecdotes about water management hearings in Deer River, Grand Rapids - remembered dialogue, personalities and problems (WW pp. 14-16, 18-19, 21-22, 27-28).

Walters also describes circa 1930s policy changes concerning the use of reservoir facilities for domestic subsistence by damtending families and the cessation of officer recreation at the dams prior to WWII (WW pp. 33-35); these accounts dovetail very closely with Carl Anderson's comments on the same general matters. As regards officer vacations, both men describe the same personal laundry brouhaha at Gull Lake.

Mr. Walters also outlines 1930s and 1940s policies concerning Leech Lake concessions very clearly. Taken together, Walters, Warren Bridge and Merton Lego offer detailed information on the fish guide facilities at Federal Dam in the 1930s and 1940s (WW pp. 8-9, 11).

Walters and Anderson before him discuss a view of the Headwaters reservoirs as "easy duty" or sportsmen's paradise. Walters notes that he felt it inappropriate to fish or even buy a fishing license due to St. Paul office preconceptions (WW p. 21); Anderson makes a point of noting that he never had time for fishing except to row officers as required (CA p. 41).

Walters describes an early discussion of recreation policy options within the Corps. Though he could not specify a date, this appears to have been a late 1940s concern. Walters argued that local interests should develop recreational facilities, not Corps of Engineer personnel (WW p. 7). Cf. Jim von Lorenz' stand on the opposite side of this issue (JvL p. 14).

Finally, Walter recollects his policies and hiring procedures for the damtending positions, the maintenance of dwellings and other dam site facilities plus the no-liquor policy at the reservoirs (WW pp. 31-33, 36-37).

III. James von Lorenz

...I just kind of moved around...but I liked it. The people that I was working with and the supervisory were good people, reasonable, and so there was no reason not to like it, really.
(JvL p. 4).

James von Lorenz uses those words to describe his early years working on the 9-foot channel for the Corps. However, that equable approach seems characteristic of his entire account.

Like Anderson and Walters, von Lorenz begins his recollections with a description of hard times in the late 1920s; his entry into Corps of Engineers work came via field surveys and engineering work for the Minnesota Highway Department and the Forestry Service (JvL p. 1-3).

Mr. von Lorenz worked in construction and field operations throughout his years with the Corps, 1930s - 1972. As regards recreational facilities in the Headwaters, he remembers his own assignment to do a preliminary survey (JvL p. 5-6) of the campgrounds possibilities at Corps damsites and early construction at the damsites (JvL pp. 7-8). Mr. von Lorenz also recollects the Indian mounds at Gull Lake (discussed by Ed Fitzpatrick in the pilot interviews), the effect of that discovery on recreational facilities construction (JvL pp. 8-9).

Mr. von Lorenz speaks of the 1961 Minnesota Legislature hearings concerning local control of the Headwaters (JvL p. 14-15). However, he also seems to conflate the 1961 events - essentially a question concerning state or federal control of the water levels - with the internal Corps debate Wes Walters mentioned concerning private/public development of recreation facilities. von Lorenz and Walters were on opposite sides of this issue; von Lorenz opposed local development on Corps land citing the design, quality control and financial resources available in-house at the St. Paul District Office (JvL p. 14). See also WW pp. 25-26 on the 1961 hearings.

Mr. von Lorenz does not remember dates well; as a consequence, there is little internal chronology in the interview beyond the general structure of his career with the Corps. Note: Though not germane to the Headwaters, Mr. von Lorenz' description of the Ford dam and circa 1930s repairs is notably clear and detailed (JvL p. 5).

IV. Jim Ruyak

To come up here, it's a quality of life decision.
(JR p. 3)

Headwaters area manager Jim Ruyak characterizes both his 1972 decision to transfer to St. Paul from the Pittsburgh District and his 1979 decision to move up to the Headwaters at a reduction in pay and responsibility as "balanced," "quality of life" decisions for himself and his family (JR p. 1-5).

Ruyak describes his major initiatives at the Remer area office as more efficient operation and more accurate visitor numbers (p. 5-6). Ruyak also discusses the new 20-year leases and other recent policy changes related the fish guide concessions at Leech Lake in the light of Corps and its relation to the local economy (JR p. 7-10).

Mr. Ruyak's discussion of water levels in relation to wild rice culture and fish spawning (JR p. 10-11, 12-13) have already been noted in comparison with Carl Anderson's; it appears that these matters have been of perennial concern in the Headwaters for 30-40 years. There is little difference in the situations described or language used by both men.

Ruyak takes pride in close working relationships with area native Americans and other state/federal bodies in the Headwaters area. He sees the shared responsibility for environmental quality and public access as important common ground among these groups (JR p. 14-18). Finally, Mr. Ruyak describes cooperative work to safeguard archaeological sites in the Headwaters, the Corps role in developing policy to recognize and protect such sites (JR p. 18-20).

V. Irv Seelye

Most of your day goes right into recreation...dealing with campers and that kind of stuff...It's really different...[T]he Corps used to do pretty near all their own work, you know what I mean. If they was going to build a new boat ramp or remodel a damtender's

house or build a warehouse, it was all done in-house...But now,...[there's] very little in-house. Don't have any laborers. Pretty near everything goes on contract now.

(IS pp. 8-9)

Irv Seelye's perspectives on dam-tending and recreational development at the Corps facilities in the Headwaters seem to fall between those of two contemporaries interviewed in the pilot series - Ed Sunde and Ole Henderson. As with Sunde, there seems to be a pride in new skills and responsibilities, as with Henderson, a nostalgia for the older ways and demonstrable products of daily work (IS p. 17).

Like Ole Henderson, Leroy Campbell and Mert Lego, Seelye is a native of the Bena-Federal Dam area, and his interview "frame" is lifelong knowledge of the area and people. His description and comparisons concerning damtending over time (IS pp. 7-8), recreational development (IS p. 12), the Remer office (IS p. 19) and the railroad (IS pp. 22-23) jibe neatly with those of other informants. As did Agnes Henderson in the pilot interviews, Seelye speaks of the government dwellings in a way that makes their value and amenities to young couples with kids in the 1940s and 1950s palpable (IS p. 2-4, 23-26).

Mr. Seelye also describes or develops several topics not considered in any depth by other informants. These include the Forest Service campgrounds and private resorts surrounding Winni (IS pp. 12, 14-15), long distance damtending/gage-reading responsibilities at Red Lake and at Knutson dam (IS pp. 10-11, 15-16). He remembers recreational surveys undertaken for Jim von Lorenz (IS p. 20-21). Also, Seelye talks with greater depth than any of the other damtenders about a mentor relationship, in his case with Henry Dart at Leech Lake (IS p. 18). His account resonates with less detailed recollections of Ed Fitzpatrick, Carl Anderson and Wesley Walters whose remarks also suggest an informal

"grooming" or scouting network. Finally, Seelye, who is 1/4 Chippewa, speaks some of his family's history in the area (IS pp. 1, 22, 24-25, 28); he also notes a lack of discrimination in his career with the Corps (IS p. 30).

The Concessionaires

I. Warren Bridge

I was originally from the central part of Iowa. My father was a great hand to go fishing on Sunday, and I was brought up that way.
(WB p. 1)

The Bridges, father and son, turned their hobby into a business in the mid-1930s. After several summers of scouting for a resort in the Headwaters area, Warren Bridge's father Harold bought a launch service in Federal Dam from the Clark family.

Much in Warren Bridge's recollections jibes with that of other informants. For instance, he describes learning the fish guide business at age eighteen from the Neuer brothers who worked for Clark and then Harold Bridge. (WB p. 3). The Neuers are mentioned by Ole Henderson and Mert Lego, as well; apparently the men were fixtures upon the scene, outdoorsmen who moved between the water and woods of Leech Lake reservoir as opportunities permitted. Bridge adds to the description of the town of Federal Dam campground initiated by Leroy Campbell and Ole Henderson in the pilot series; apparently, it was a "tetotal" or anti-liquor facility (WB pp. 6-7). Bridge's memories of his own family's automobile trips into the Headwaters in the 1930s give a sense of road conditions, and geographic range, shared by other vacationers at the time (WB pp. 1-2, 8). His description of the town of Federal Dam and the railroad fishing excursions of the 1930s (WB p. 16) resonate with

Mert Lego's memories of his father's [Russell Lego, Sr.] businesses in town, hunting guests and the like.

In terms of Corps of Engineers matters, Bridge describes the relocation of the concession offices at Leech Lake following WWII (WB pp. 8-9), an incident that Wesley Walters remembers as well. There is no fundamental disagreement in the two men's accounts of the particulars, though their perspectives and interests are different. Bridge also mentions the same floating bog that figures in the Carl Anderson interview; Bridge contributes a wonderful description of the concessionaires "sedge-herding" with their launch boats to corral the bog up against the dam where it could then be pushed through (WB pp. 9-11).

As regards the fish guide concessions, Bridge gives an informative outline of his own business (WB pp. 3-6) that includes recognition of changing vacation patterns (WB pp. 4, 12-13). He describes his sources and strategies in recruiting employees (WB pp. 11-12), a gradual decrease in Leech Lake fishing, though not the fish guide business, from the 1950s on (WB p. 12). He also expresses concern regarding stocking of muskelunge on Leech, a fish he describes as destructive (WB p. 14), and winter fishing (WB p. 15).

II. Lee Staley

...around 6:00 o'clock, we have people showing up wanting bait, gas. And our regular customers start showing up after 7:00...And it's quite a long day when you go out fishing, come back in around 1 o'clock, eat a hurried lunch and get the boat ready to go back out and come in about 7. And we are usually open until about 10-10:30 at night, because a lot of people want to stop by to pick up bait or tackle.

(LS p. 17)

As this description of a typical summer day during the season suggests, Lee Staley's interview is specific and descriptive. He gives a very clear picture of daily routines and practices within a contemporary boat launch concession at Federal Dam - including his own business services (LS pp. 2-3, 12-13, 17-18), prices and reservation systems for walleye and muskie fishing (LS p. 4), methods of fishing (LS pp. 5, 9) and the element of competition among the Federal Dam concessions (LS pp. 9-10). Taken together, the Staley-Wescott launch service (1973-74 to the present) and the Bridge family operation (1936-1986) give a long term view of conditions and concerns in the fish guide business on Leech Lake over the past 50 years.

As regards Corps/concessions matters, Staley addresses the same general issues that area manager Jim Ruyak speaks of - a relative decline in business, reduction of the leases from 5 to three in number, lengthening of the remaining leases to 20 years (LS pp. 6, 10-12, 15-16). Unlike the Bridges (husband & wife) and Mert Lego, Staley is not critical of the Corps recreational facilities as competitive with private business in the area (LS p. 19). Staley suggests the desirability of turning the vacant damtender dwelling at Leech into an historical facility of some kind, citing the need for rainy day and fair weather visitor alternatives (LS p. 21). Note: Unlike Warren Bridge, Mr. Staley does not ascribe any particular benefit to the Corps leases, as distinct from private property (LS p. 24).

When asked about native American presence and acquaintance in the area, Staley noted that his family had gotten to know many Leech Lake Indian people socially when newcomers to Federal Dam. He noted the importance of Indian custom to his business and the cooperative activities of Indian and white business operators through the Leech Lake Alliance (LS p. 22-24).

Community Perspectives

I. Merton Lego

...we're kind of free-e-e people around here, you know...free to come and go. And then you see these, 'can't park here'...'can't stop the boat here' and do this and do that. You'd probably wouldn't be doin' it that way, anyway. But you don't have to have a dozen signs tellin' you, you know.

(ML p. 38)

Mert Lego is something of a critic of the Corps of Engineers operations in the Headwaters. Though he describes the Corps campground at Federal Dam as "beautiful", "I've never seen better" he also says it shouldn't have been built along the river, as distinct from the lake. As it happens, he's got a farm for sale that would've been perfect (ML pp. 38-39). He's also critical of dredging and water levels policy as those have affected wildlife habitat and, to a certain extent, wild rice culture (ML pp. 22-23, 38).

More than anything though, Lego's criticisms seem to be based on a sense of encroaching federal presence during his lifetime; this includes the Forest Service and other agencies as well as the Corps (ibid). The contrast is with memories of his youth in Federal Dam. He describes the dam area as a town playground for children and a meeting area for people, generally (ML pp. 3-4). The Lego family rented the damtender dwelling at Leech Lake during WWII (ML pp. 9-14), and his affectionate descriptions of a boy's paradise - stockraising, hunting off the lake and the like - suggest deep, in a sense proprietary, attachments to the government compound, the sort of attachments that give one the right to criticize freely.

Mr. Lego is also one-quarter Chippewa on his father's side. In addition to his private business interests, he coordinates the Cass Lake tribal council's wild rice and logging operations. Some of his

questions concerning Corps and federal policy generally arise from native American history and treaty rights.

The Lego interview contains a detailed overview of wild rice culture in the Leech Lake area and beyond (ML pp. 24-30). He identifies damtenders (ML pp. 5-7) and also owners of the boat liveries at Federal Dam over time. Mr. Lego describes the services and the guides as he remembers them (ML pp. 17-22). His description of family history plus his father's business interests and real estate concerns give an illuminating view of community and opportunities among native Americans and whites in the area (ML 1-3, 25, 32-36).

The Lego interview "works off" almost every other collected in the Series II group. Taken together, the Ruyak and Lego interviews provide perspective on contemporary public land management issues in the Headwaters. In combination with the Bridge, Walters and Staley views of Leech Lake concessions and recreation, Lego provides a fourth perspective. Carl Anderson as damtender and Mert Lego as a youthful community resident are describing Leech Lake in the same decade. Finally, the Lego interview and the Seelye interview offer complementary views of families that participate in both native American and "white" or dominant culture institutions in the Headwaters area.

Notes on the pilot and series II interviews

Many specific points of comparison among the pilot and series II interviews appear in the text of the preceding summary section. Readers are encouraged to consult passages within the transcripts as those have been noted for fullest amplification. The following comments will address questions of internal consistency, narrative voice and comparison to written documentation.

As the interview summaries demonstrate, there is a great deal of internal consistency within the Series II oral histories and the earlier pilot project data. Few differences of fact or recollection surface, though significant differences of interpretation regarding damtending vs. recreational development, public vs. private development of campgrounds, native American vs. Corps interests are articulated within the combined interview series. Documentation of this sort of range of opinion and interpretation is generally considered a primary value in recording oral testimony.

As was noted in the pilot project report, the Headwaters narrators speak from notably different styles and contexts. In Series II, Mert Lego is a disarmingly genial critic whose authority is based on "insider" perspectives as a native of Federal Dam and a quarterblood Chippewa. Jim Ruyak, a career civilian engineer with Corps, speaks with notable frankness about a family situation that led him to seek the Headwaters position at the same time that he gives an "official" view of his work in the area. Wesley Walters, a career civilian of another generation, recollects much as a bureaucrat with issue positions and budget responsibilities to defend. From von Lorenz, one gets the sense that the outdoors, physical aspects of field engineering were the heart and soul of it for him; this perspective is reminiscent of pilot project

narrator Ole Henderson's "a damtenders' damtender" perspective in some respects. Irv Seelye comes across as someone who is both somewhat reserved and also thoughtfully observant. Lee Staley, through his cautious self-presentation, and Warren Bridge, through his expansive sociability, remind us that fish guides must be able to get on well with a wide range of people and demonstrate two different approaches to that task.

When considering the fit between the Headwaters testimony and available written documentation concerning Corps facilities and operations in the area (primarily found in Annual Reports and special studies). two aspects are especially worthy of note. First, the overall fit between narrators' recollections and other documentation is very close indeed. Significant events such as the Sandy high water in 1950 and the Leech dam break in 1957, specific repairs to dwellings and dams, on-going changes such as building the campgrounds, new maintenance buildings, etc. appear in close chronology in both sets of sources.

There are some inconsistencies. For instance, Carl Anderson remembers the Blandin papermill break as 1948 instead of 1949. However, that's not a "wrong" answer so much as it is remembering an event half a lifetime ago a little off the mark.

Secondly, in looking at Annual Reports entries concerning the Headwaters compounds, one is struck by how much detail the narrators supply to fairly terse entries. See, for instance, Irv Seelye's description of the newly electrified sluice gates at Winnibigoshish (IS p. 7-8) in comparison with Carl Anderson's description of manual sluice gate operation and the electrification of gages at Pokegama (CA pp. 12, 17-18, 23-25). The fact of such changes is covered under sentences such

as "modernization of Leech Lake Dam begun" in the Annual Reports (Annual Report, 1969, p. 818). And some events of interest, such as removal of the officers quarters from the dam compounds, do not appear in the Annual Reports at all; in these instances, narrators' recollections and documents now archived outside the St. Paul District offices appear to be the only available sources. Finally, the Headwaters interviews locate the reservoirs in relation to the surrounding communities and to local views. The narrators discuss regional history, daily life activities, and importantly, points of tension, and conflict and cooperation concerning the operation of the dams.

Recommendations and Conclusion

Taken altogether, the interviews conducted in the pilot project and series II provide a multifaceted narrative history of Corps operations in Headwaters from the 1930s to the 1980s. Major changes such as the end of officers' vacation visits, dam breaks, daily work routines, development of recreation facilities, wild rice and environmental issues and some community history, particularly in the Federal Dam area, are discussed in corroborative detail. The majority of known retired damtenders have been interviewed.

Given the general strength of the Headwaters sample and range, no further specialized interviewing is indicated at this time. There are "holes" in the series. For instance, there is no extended consideration of Gull Lake, the largest and most heavily used recreation complex operated by the the Corps in the Headwaters. This would be an important addition on its own terms and in supplement to Edward Fitzpatrick's and Ed Sunde's accounts concerning initial development of the area. Walt Hermerding, the present project manager is retiring soon; his perspectives could be documented easily as part of an "exit" interview program with retiring staff members.

The Headwaters interviews, generally, suggest the importance of selective oral history interview upon the occasion of retirement. Both Wesley Walters and James von Lorenz explicitly commented upon their fading memories for names and specific dates in the course of recording the Headwaters interviews, noting the decades since they'd left the positions and responsibilities under consideration in the project. This has to do with individual memory to a certain extent, and, as it happens, both men contributed significantly to the series. However, when one compares the stretch required after years of absence with the

fluid and highly detailed narrative of an Irv Seelye, just on the point of retirement, the advisability of an on-going program is well worth consideration.

Finally, there is the matter of narrator review of oral history transcripts. This is an occasionally delicate matter in oral history projects; we recommend that the St. Paul District devise an explicit policy concerning narrator review before undertaking any further oral history. This should be done in consultation with experienced archivists at the Minnesota Historical Society, the University of Minnesota and perhaps corporate or institutional oral historians whose concerns would be similar to those of Environmental Resources staff at the St. Paul District Office, as well as HISTORY AFIELD staff.

The interviews collected to date have not been submitted to narrators for review. This is because of the possibility for awkwardness or embarrassment in response to literal transcription. The underlying issue is one of self-presentation--how to accomodate cultural background and grammatical conventions among a diverse group of informants. Some Headwaters narrators have graduate and college training, others have little schooling and learned their skills on the job.

The range of styles and voices documented in the Headwaters oral histories constitutes a form of evidence concerning Corps employees in itself, but it also demands thoughtful handling. HISTORY AFIELD investigators have edited the Corps transcripts with literal fidelity to the tape recordings collected, believing that no alteration of the record should occur prior to consideration of the overall range of narrator styles likely to be encountered in a Corps project and formulation of an editing policy. Now that the material is in hand,

consideration of the issues raised is indicated. On the most pragmatic level, grammatical errors, false starts and other standard vagaries of spoken communication abound in the transcripts, and we know that narrators are sometimes chagrined to see such language on the page - entirely, non-judgmentally human though it is. This sometimes inhibits transfer of archival rights. On a more theoretical level, the narrator is, in a sense, the co-producer and co-owner of any oral history tape, pending transfer into a repository. There is an issue of accountability here. For these reasons we do recommend a consultation on the right to review, the matter of informant comfort (via editing or prefatory remarks) and the historical commitment to accuracy; it is both prudent and responsible.

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Figure 1
Chippewa National Forest, 1937
MHS.

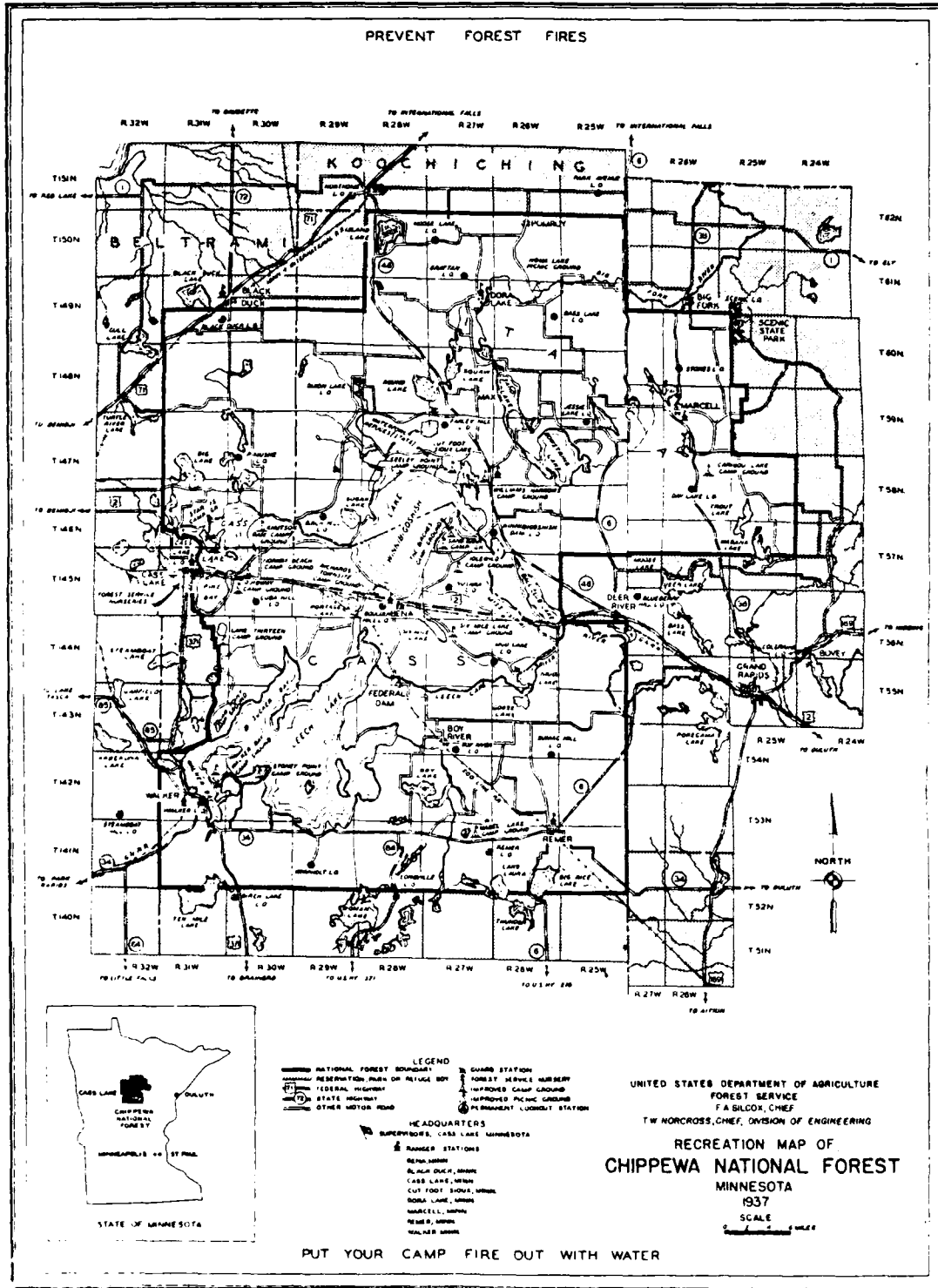


Figure 2
Gull Lake Dam, 1984. Corps of
Engineers

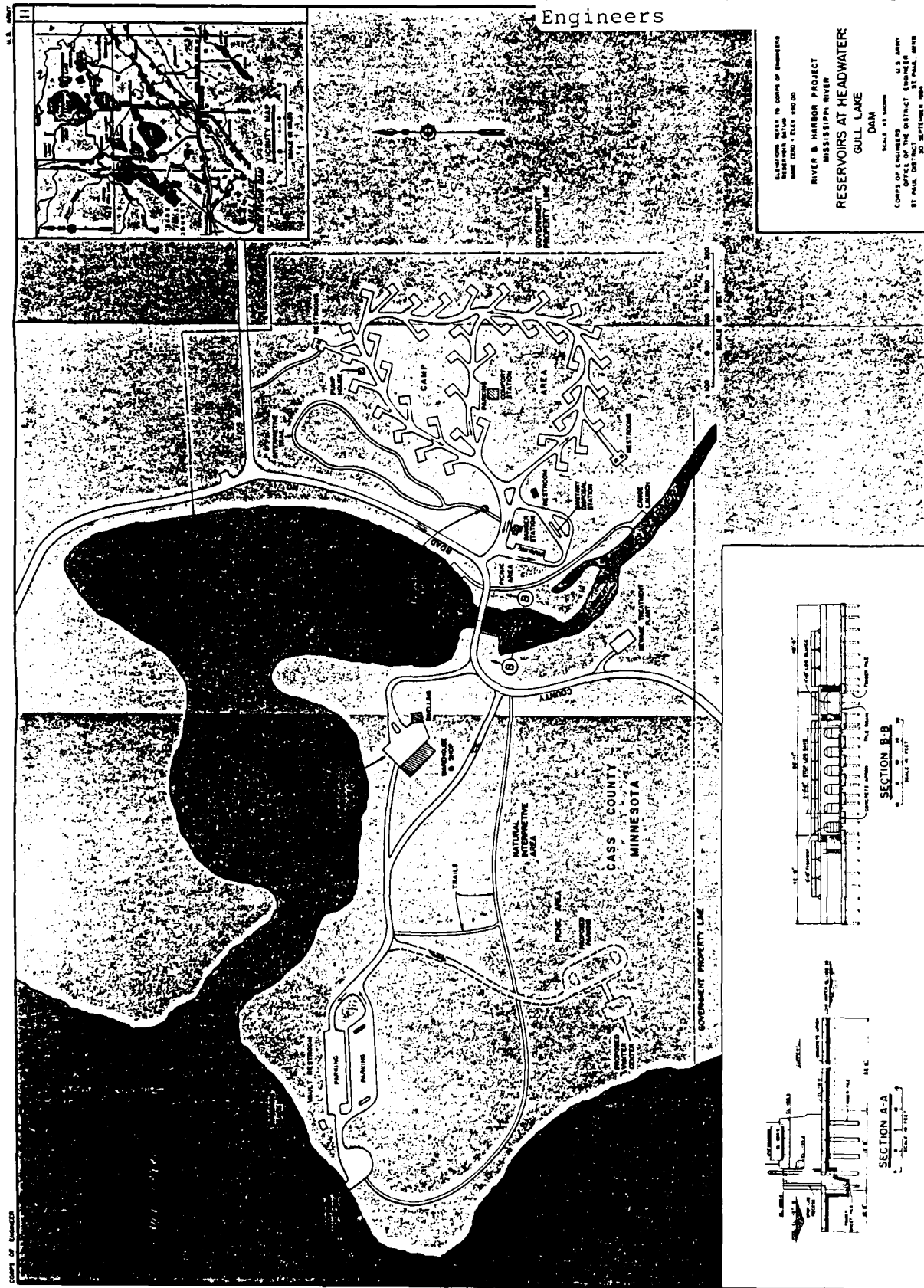


Figure 3
 Leech Lake Dam. 1984. Corps of Engineers.

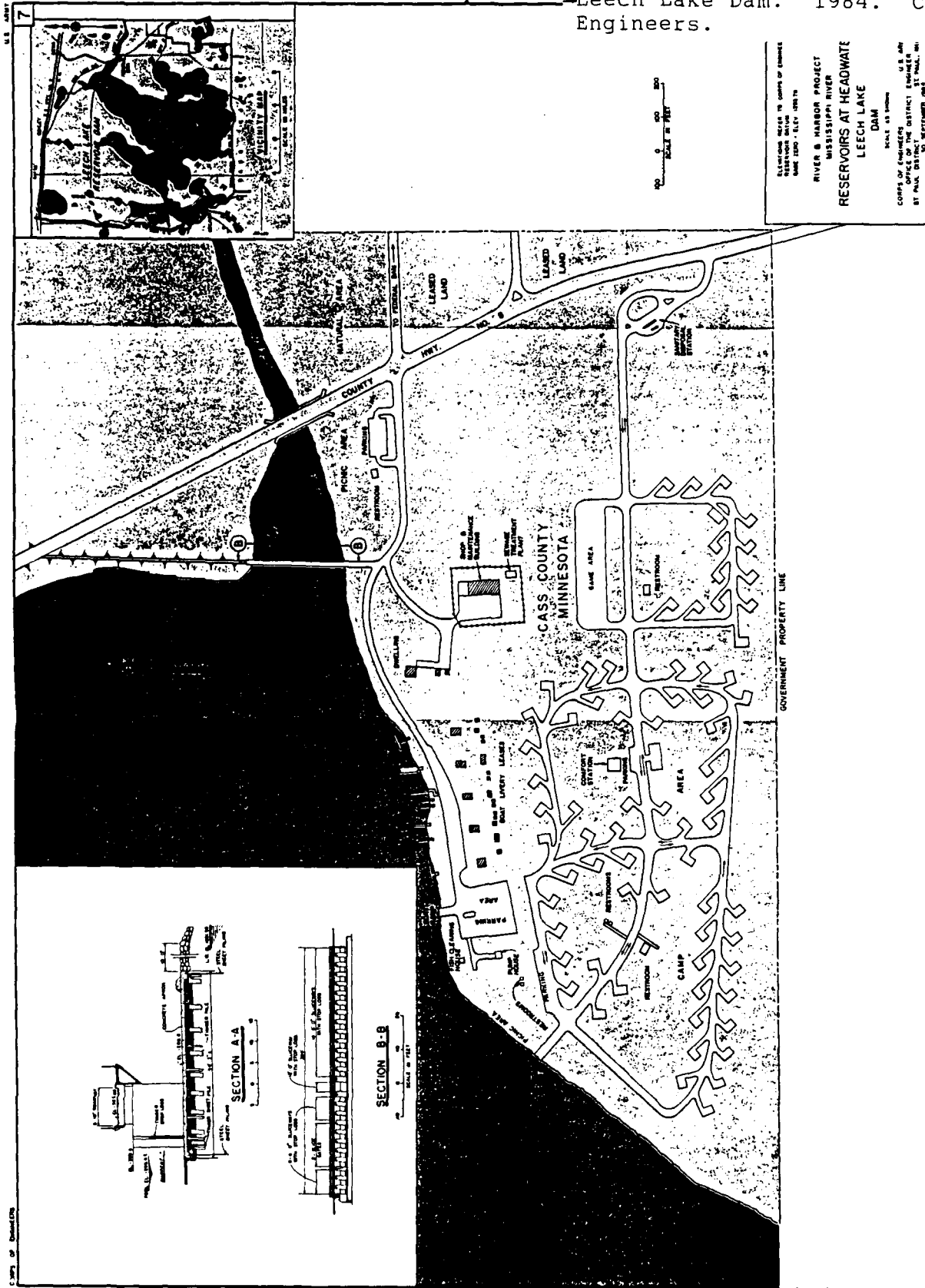


Figure 4
- Pine River Lake. 1982. Corps
of Engineers.

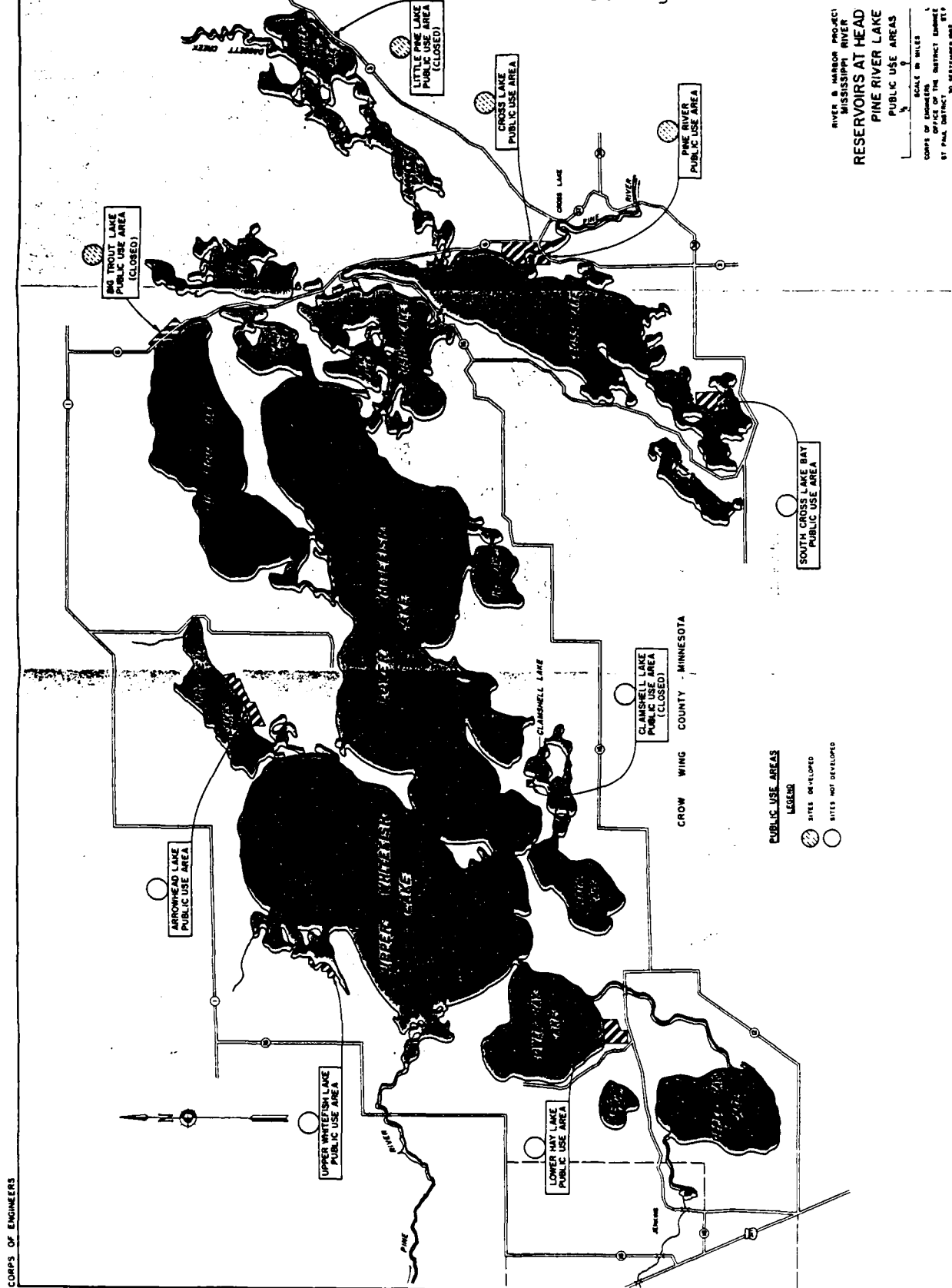


Figure 5
—Pokegama Lake Dam. 1982.
of Engineers.

Scale: as shown

RIVER & HARBOR REC.
MISSISSIPPI RIVE.
RESERVOIRS AT HEA.
POKEGAMA LAKE
DAM

Corps of Engineers
Mississippi River District
St. Paul, Minn.

Scale: 1" = 100'

Scale: 1" = 100'

Figure 6
 - Sandy Lake Dam & Lock. 1982.
 Corps of Engineers

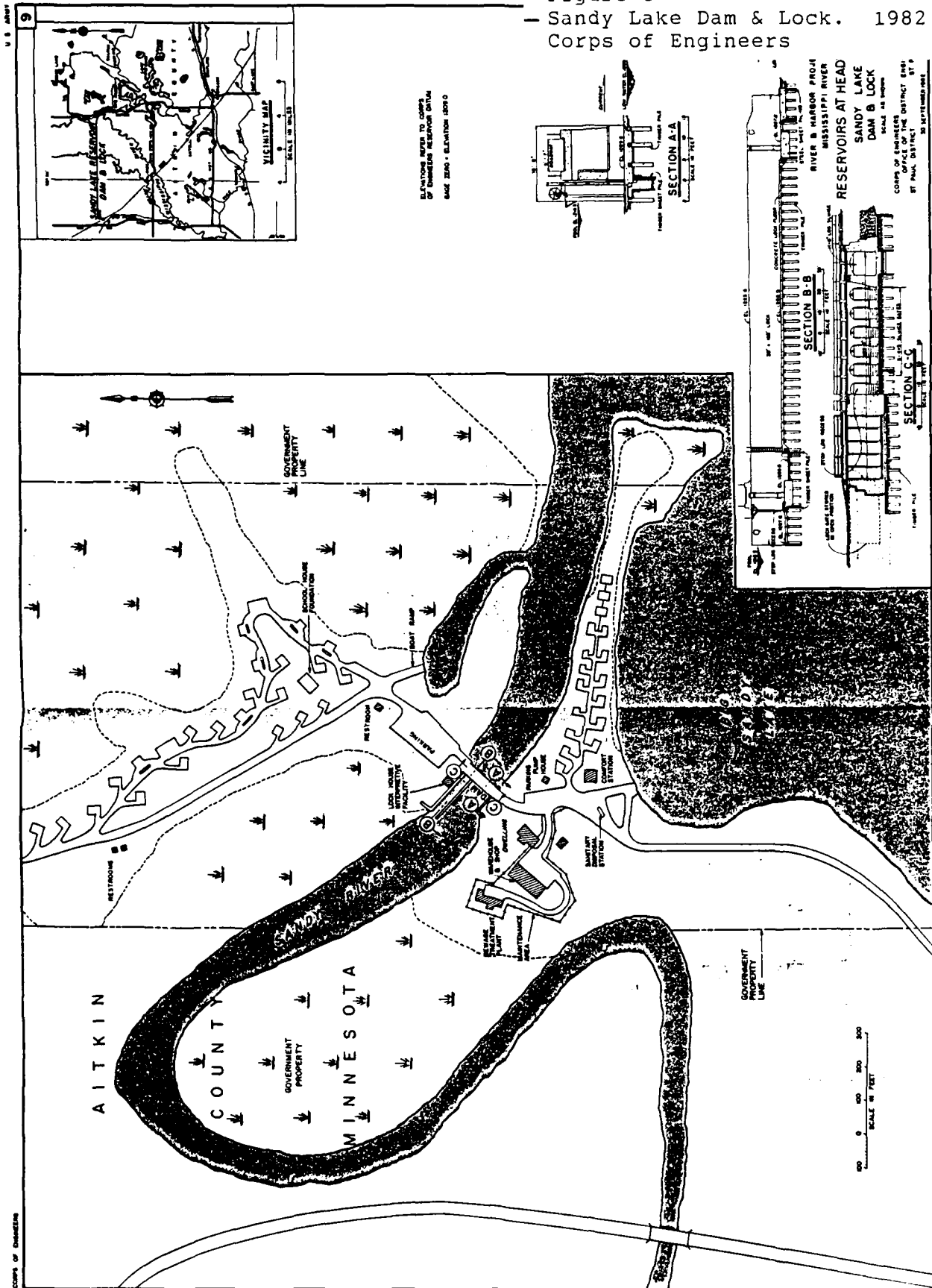


Figure 7

Winnibigoshish Lake Dam. 1977. -
Corps of Engineers.

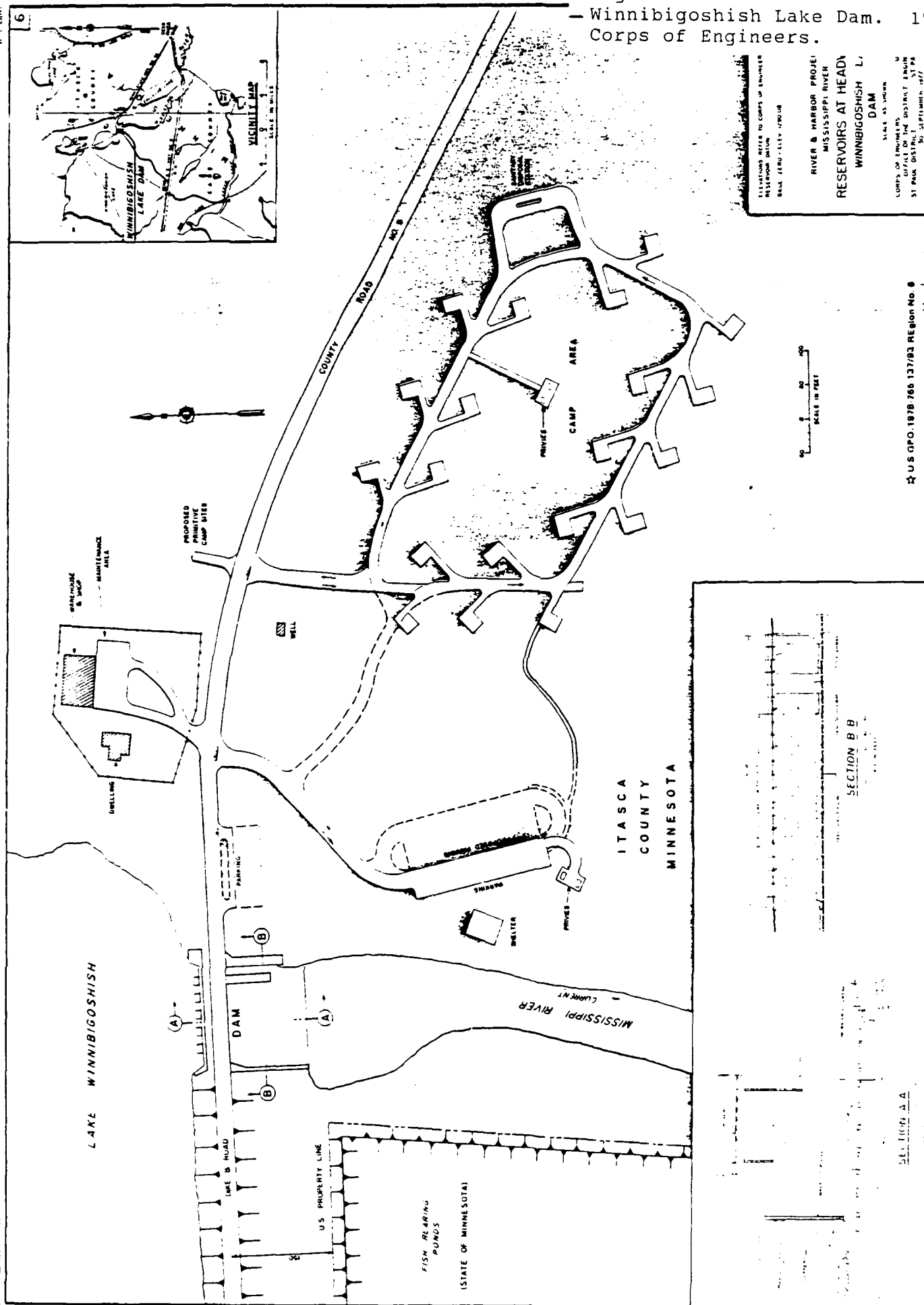


Figure 9

Leech Lake boat liveries, 1963.

This detail from larger map documents post WWII leases and physical arrangements described by Wesley Walters, Warren Bridge, Jim Ruyak and Lee Staley. Corps of Engineers.

CORPS OF ENGINEERS

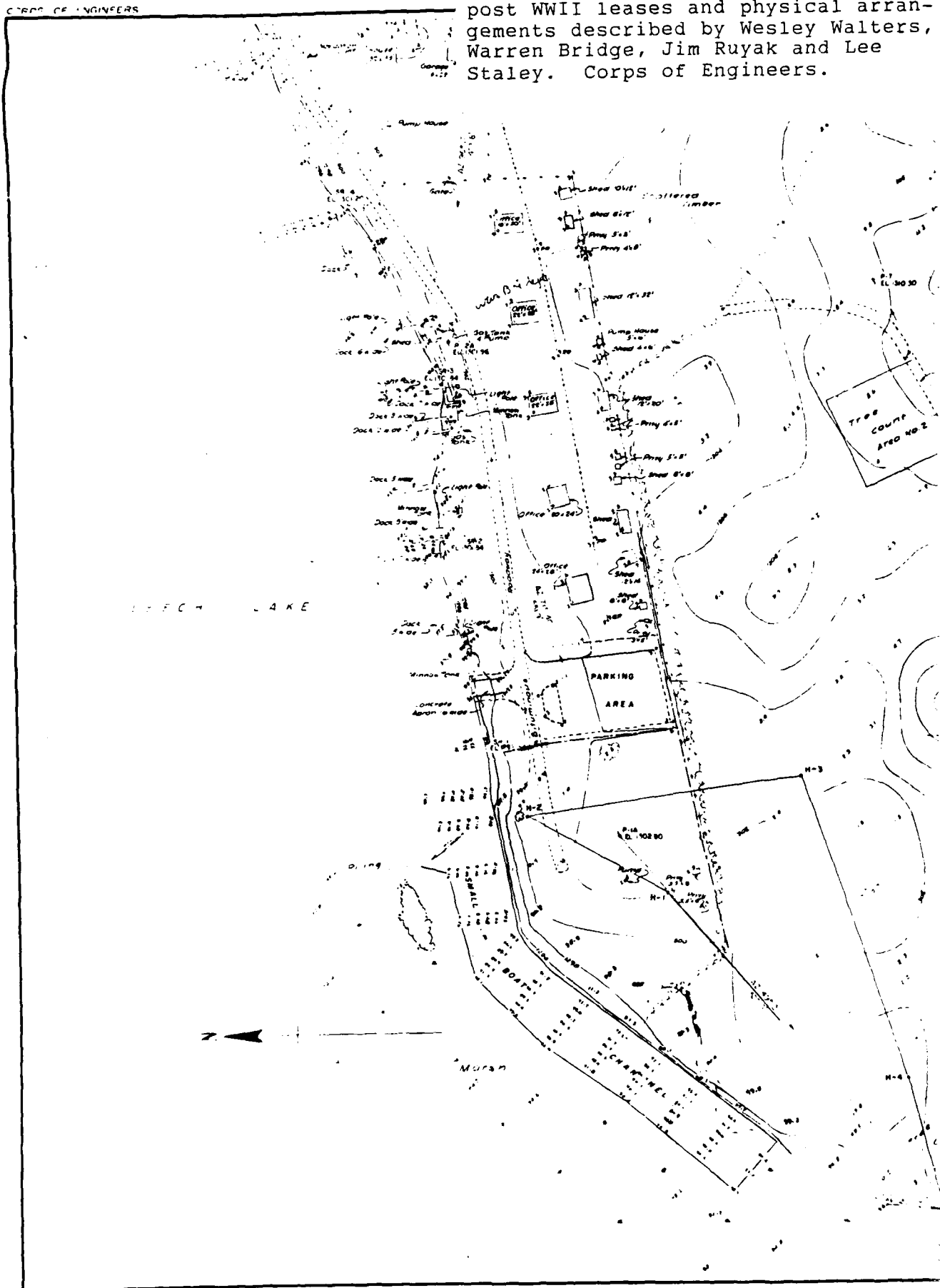
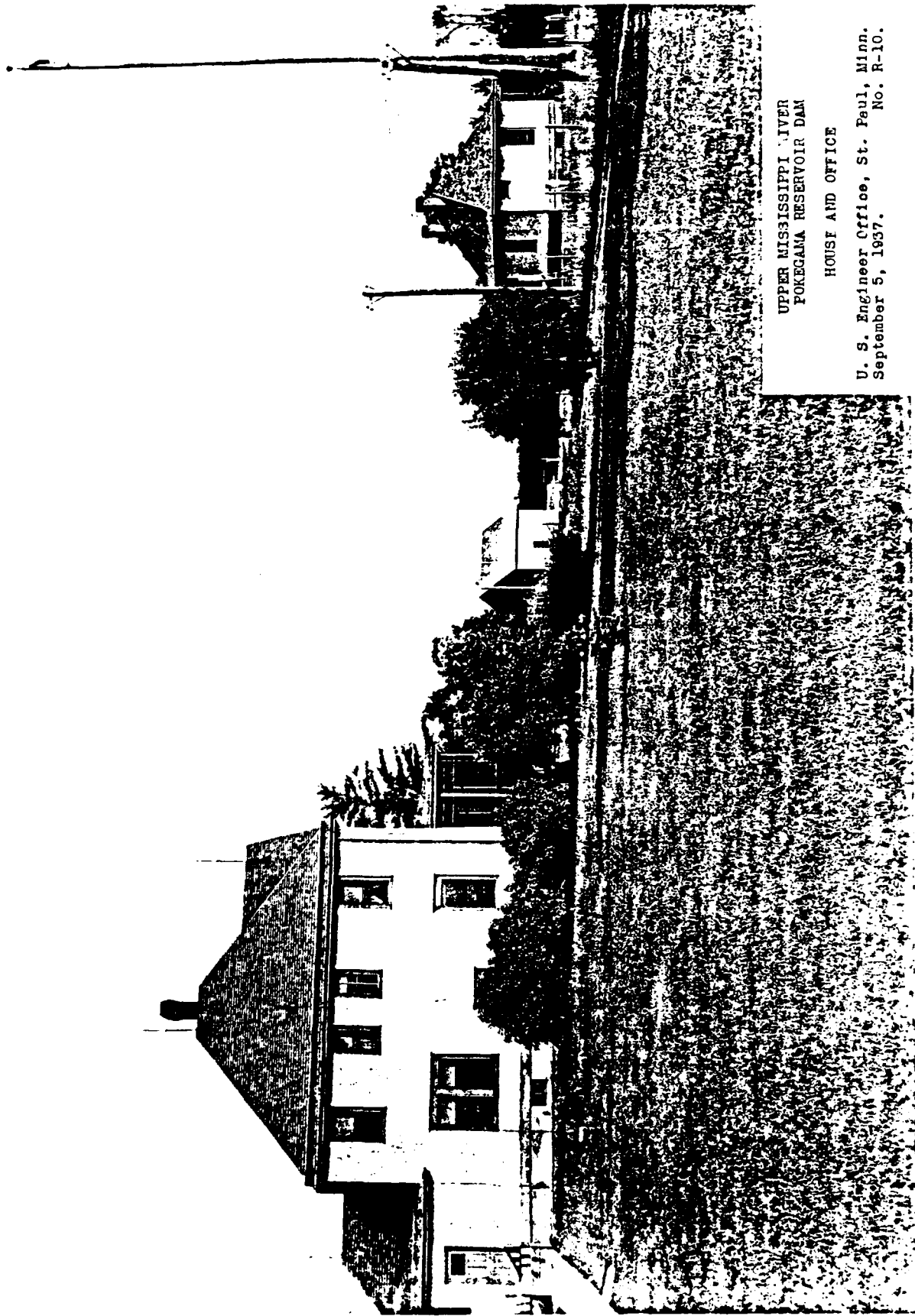


Figure 10
Pokegama house & office. 1937.
Corps of Engineers.



UPPER MISSISSIPPI RIVER
POKEGAMA RESERVOIR DAM
HOUSE AND OFFICE

U. S. Engineer Office, St. Paul, Minn.
September 5, 1937. No. R-10.

Figure 11
Pokegama garage & chicken coop. 1937.
1937. Corps of Engineers.

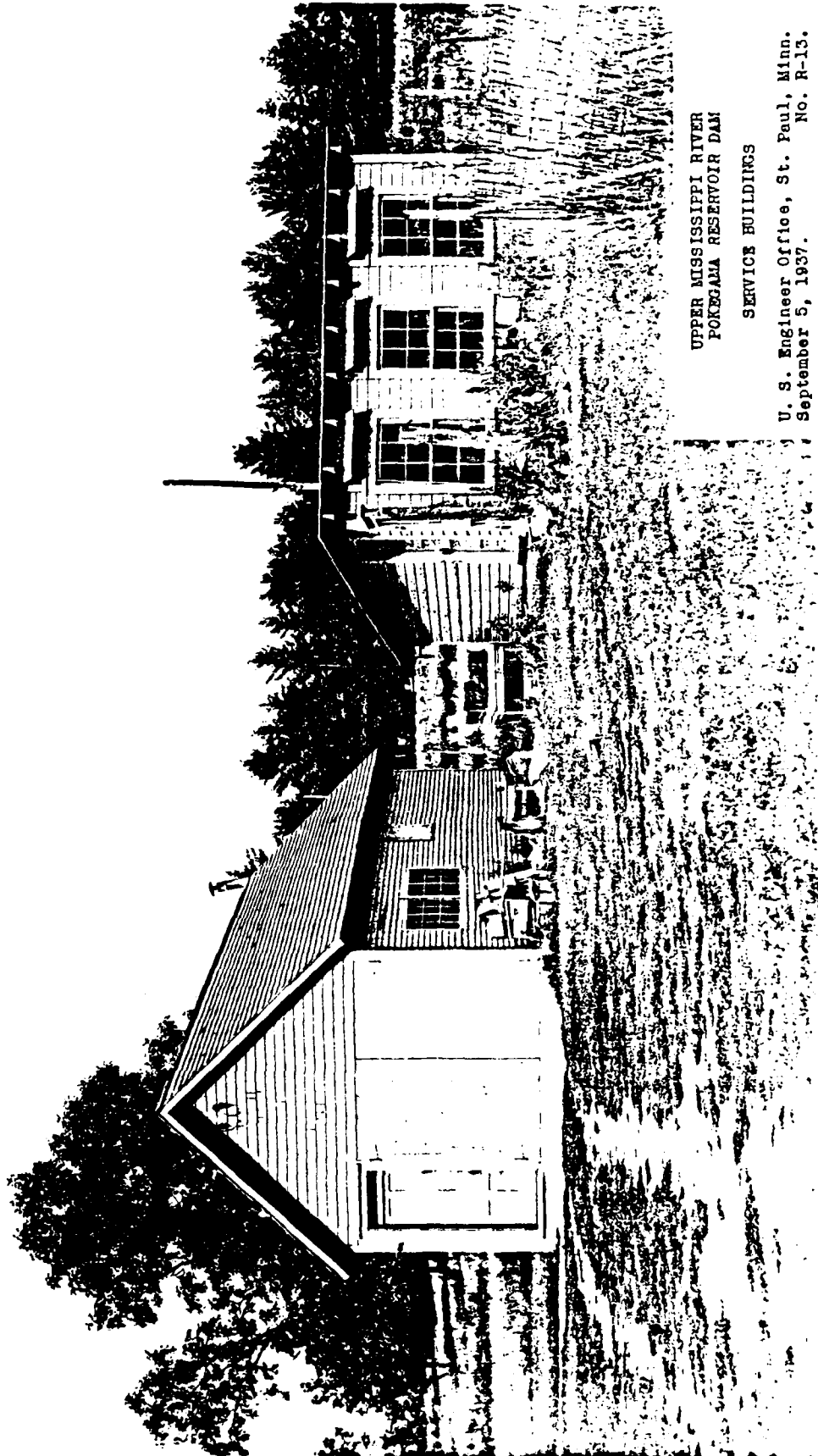
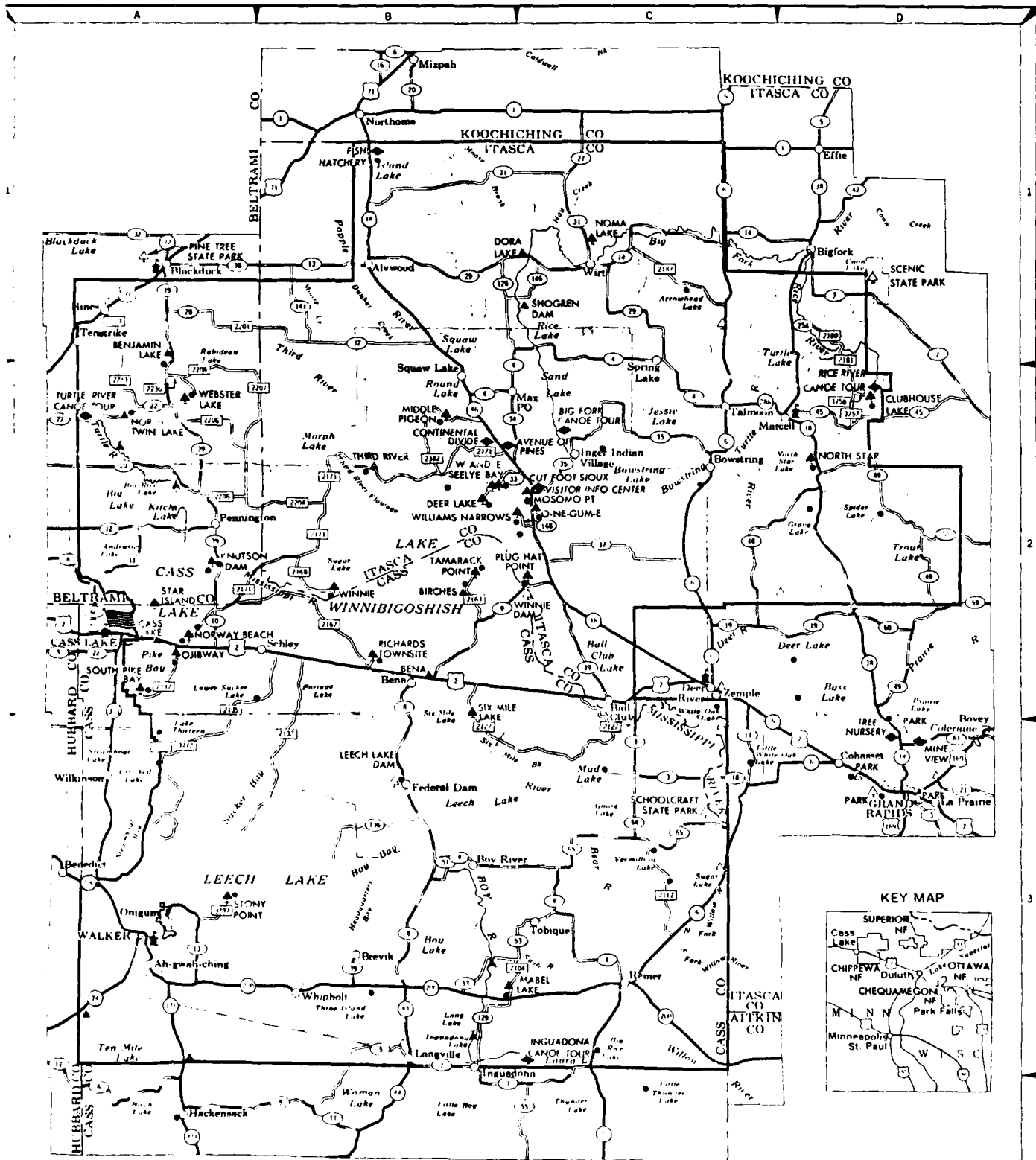


Figure 12
Chippewa National Forest. 1973.
Cf. for landmarks described by
Headwaters narrators. MHS.



Appendix A/Transcripts

Anderson

Bridge

Lego

Ruyak

Seelye

Staley

von Lorenz

Walters

U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS, ST. PAUL DISTRICT

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW FORM

Narrator Name: Carl A. Anderson

Address: 825 Summit Ave. #908, Mpls, MN

Date of Interview: 2-26-88

Place of Interview: Anderson Apt.

Name of Interviewer: Jo Blatti

Project Title (if any): Headwaters Series II

Narrator Biographical Information:

Full name (including maiden name): Carl Arthur Anderson

Year of Birth: April 28, 1896, Kensington, MN

Spouse's full name: Cora Otterness Anderson

Subjects Discussed:

Mr. Anderson discusses work with Corps of Engineers, 1931-1958.

Subjects discussed include WWI service, work as inspector at Twin Cities and Alma locks in early 1930s; transfer to Headwaters ca 1933-34; damtending at Gull Lake ca 1933-34-1937, at Pokegama 1937-1958. Describes wife's refusal to do personal laundry for officers' family at Gull circa 1935; his own inquiry into 24-hour "on-call" status in early 1950s. Other matters discussed include responsibility for Leech Lake dam in WWII, various repairs at Leech & Pokegama, work with Ball Club Indians on wild rice water levels at Goose Lake ca WWII; effect of water levels on Northern & walleye spawning; Izaak Walton League activities; National Youth Administration supervision of teenagers at Gull in 1930s; differences between use of grounds for family subsistence at Gull & Pokegama; floating bog at Leech in WWII; fellow damtender Henry Dart; 1948 washout Blandin Corp paper mill dam at Grand Rapids; detailed description preparation and operation stop log sluices; post-retirement volunteer work on water levels issues.

TAPE RECORDING:

No. of Cassettes: 2 No. of Reels & Speed: _____

Length of Interview: 2 hours, 5 minutes

Release form signed (date): 2-26-88

Restrictions (if any): -0-

Comments: Good quality audio; clock ticking and chiming in background. Recorder pops off momentarily early in interview.

TRANSCRIPT:

Date completed: February 1988 No. of Pages: _____

Restrictions (if any): -0-

Comments: Note: Informant has some good photographs of repairs at Pokegama & Leech, copies of Pokegama logbook entries 1894-1958.

TAPE INDEX

Corps/Mississippi Headwaters Interviews, Series II
Interview with Carl A. Anderson
February 26, 1988
(2 hours, 5 minutes)

Tape 1, Side 1

- 0 mins. Describes WWI service in Navy medical corps, Azores Islands, various jobs throughout 1920s.
- Decision to re-enter government service via preferred status as WWI veteran.
- Work for Corps, beginning 1931, on Twin Cities locks & dams.
- 5 mins. Clerk on Corps dredge Cahaba on Mississippi 9 ft. channel ca 1932.
- Describes work as inspector at Alma, lock & dam no. 4, in 9-ft. channel project on the Mississippi.
- Also worked as inspector for construction of channel markers in Mississippi.
- Fall of 1933 [or 1934] family moved up to Gull Lake dam in Headwaters.
- Pay cut from \$2000 as inspector downriver to \$1320 as damtender.
- 10 mins. Headwaters Reservoirs as places for officers to relax.
- Describes incident at Gull Lake ca. 1935 in which his wife refused to do personal laundry for officer and family.
- Marked beginning of strict inspection by officers.
- 15 mins. Notes govt. work programs at Gull Lake - special detail concerning Nat'l Youth Administration; 4-5 local (rural) high school dropouts assigned to Gull.
- Describes landscaping, dry well and tempering steel projects with N.Y.A. boys.
- Notes proportion of his time needed to keep the dwelling warm.
- Describes putting up ice in January with surrounding resort people.
- Describes inspection trips to Corps flowage rights lands in 1930s drought period.

20 mins. Furnished reports to [1930s] low water hearings, but had little to do with public meetings.

Describes situation as live-in damtender, 7 days, 24-hours on call. Doubts that any damtender could live up to the literal terms of that "peculiar order".

Notes that relief men for vacations good for readings and flag raisings/lowerings, not actually competent to operate dam.

Identifies Pokegama neighbor who served as relief man for him.

25 mins. Notes criticism of Gull Lake predecessor but reluctant to discuss details.

Both Gull and Pokegama "independent duty," no damtender's assistant either site.

Identifies local relief person at Gull Lake dam.

Explains repair problem at Pokegama dam in late 1930s that he was assigned to work on (leakage underneath foundation).

Tape 1, Side 2

0 mins. Continues discussion of Pokegama repairs ca 1937.

Anderson family movement with Corps - Minneapolis, Nelson WI, then Headwaters.

Expected to make part of living at Gull - garden, chickens, cattle, milk cow.

Pokegama full-time, less supplementary work.

5 mins. Raise in pay, from \$1320. to \$1500. at Pokegama.

Good barn and chicken coop, sons in 4-H.

Wife a school teacher, re-entered market during WWII labor shortages.

Story of the Andersons' courtship in Braham, MN, early married years in Chicago, Denver and Gillette, Wyoming.

Lack of compensation for WWI soldiers, cashed in insurance policy 1936 and bought new car.

10 mins. Government service as "last resort" 1920s veterans, good decision to go with Corps despite harsh conditions.

Pokegama in wintertime/stop logs at -30 degrees F.

Regret that district engineers didn't see need for more recreation - guilt over his own activities with church choir, city band, etc.

1952-1953 asked permission to pursue matter of damtenders' on-call status.

Applied to African construction project in expectation that queries might result in severance.

15 mins. Actual upshot a 40-hour work week for damtenders and overtime on Saturdays and Sundays.

1958 retirement.

Notes dual responsibility for Pokegama and Leech Lake in WWII, identifies Federal Dam Indian who read Leech gages for him.

Describes floating bog incident (ca 1942).

Removal of pilings at Leech dam, assistance of recluse Swede who knew how to handle dynamite.

20 mins. Dismantling of rock-filled cribs at Leech in same period, bar to further bog pile-ups.

Notes rental of Leech dwelling to merchant family.

25 mins. Henry Dart as an esp. skilled man, a "wizard" at rough or fine work, "too good to be damtender," never mentioned in official Corps history.

Dart as supervisor installation automatic gages at Pokegama ca 1954, '55.

Continuous record of gage readings.

Tape 2, Side 1

0 mins. No other mechanization in Anderson's years at Pokegama.

Installation of protective railings by hand.

Refacing of bear trap valve on log sluice.

5 mins. Winter of 1941 leakage repair/use of dyed water to locate problem, materials and processes used to plug leak, need to heat materials and work areas.

10 mins. 1948 wash out of paper mill dam [Blandin Corp, Grand Rapids].

Description of process interaction Corps office, St. Paul and paper mill.

Explains general procedures to close dam.

15 mins. Continues description of stop log preparation and maintenance, special equipment needed, adapted to tasks.

20 mins. Indians and wild rice harvest Goose Lake, water levels, during WWII years Leech.

Story of postwar harvest handled badly by outsiders.

25 mins. Chief Ed Wilson honorary member Izaak Walton League, Anderson's respect for Indians.

Rental of Leech Lake dwelling to Lego family [part Indian] during WWII.

Restructure of Pokegama dwelling ca 1950s, Dart supervised.

Inspects 1937 map of Pokegama site.

30 mins. Notes no changes during his tenure, locates root cellar opposite officers quarters.

Gave up gardening after boys went into service.

Recounts wife's bout with illness 1946, failing health following 1964 retirement from teaching.

His own Corps life as healthy, always some saving, pleasure at continuing contact with other fellows who worked on these projects.

35 mins. Gives address for 9-ft. channel engineer, Christianson.

Notes very little in the way of public recreation at Pokegama in his years, mostly fishing off dam.

Need to regulate public access for safety reasons during repairs and general operations, collaboration with game warden.

40 mins. Built fence and gate to regulate, discouraged boats above dam.

No camping or picnicking in his years.

Noted increasing visitor traffic, need to plan for public.

Increase in RVs since his retirement in 1958.

Tape 2, Side 2

0 mins. Looks at 1937 pictures of Pokegama site, notes hand mowing of lawn.

Describes back kitchen used as storage, problem of water pipes (laid over bedrock) freezing in open winters.

5 mins. Well as auxiliary water supply; garage and chicken coop as "old".

Part of job at Gull to keep telephone line open to Brainerd (11 miles).

Never had time to become hunter and fisher.

10 mins. Preferred choir, band, VFW, family vacations.

Work with Izaak Walton League.

Describes fish spawning - fish kills/water levels during I. Walton League presidency, Northern pike and walleyes.

15 mins. Following retirement, worked on other water level matters - Corps should give advance notice of level changes.

Brings out his copies of logbook entries 1894-1958, usefulness to his volunteer work.

Never without something to do.

U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS, ST. PAUL DISTRICT

ORAL HISTORY AGREEMENT FORM

I, Carl A. Anderson, a participant in
an oral history interview recorded on February 20, 1987,
hereby give and deliver to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, St. Paul
District all the incidents of ownership in that interview, including
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Signed:

Date

2-20-87

Carl A. Anderson
Donor

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Signed:

J. Ratti
Interviewer

TRANSCRIPT
Corps/Mississippi Headwaters Project
Interview with Carl Anderson by Jo Blatti
February 26, 1988

Tape 1, Side 1

It is Friday, February 26. I am Jo Blatti interviewing Carl Anderson in his apartment in Minneapolis. This subject of our conversation today is Mr. Anderson's work with the Corps of Engineers, particularly his work in the Headwaters Reservoirs, as a damtender.

INT: Could I ask, Mr. Anderson, if you could just tell me a little bit about your background and how you got to the Corps of Engineers as a young man?

CA: Well, I'll have to begin with the -, my service perhaps with WWI and the ah, in the Navy. During my service with the Navy as a-, in the Medical Corps, stationed at the naval base hospital 13 in the Azores Islands. Among other duties, nursing, I was called upon to do the embalming, which I had learned from my father at Braham, Minnesota. After the war, I thought perhaps that I would get back in business with him, but this did not occur. And as a result, for several years I had several different types of work, among which was editor of the Braham Journal, teaching school in Wyoming and being out of work in Minneapolis. It was toward the later part of the, of the 20's that I ah, thought perhaps the best thing I could do was to go back into government service of some kind and this did occur. I was called to work by ah, Mr. Fairchild, who was in charge of the building of the locks at lock and dam No. 1, just ah, in Minneapolis.

INT: Now did you know him or -?

CA: No

INT: Had you put in an application, how did this?

CA: I had put in an application. In fact, I had put in applications for several government offices, and this was the, one of the first ones that came along.

INT: Now did you have, could I, if I could ask here, did you have some kind of preferred status as a veteran of WWI?

CA: Yes, yes, I did. I had a 10% advantage as having been a veteran, but, Mr. Fairchild, when he called me by phone in January 1931, he asked me if I could do rough carpenter work and I told him, 'yes sir, very rough'. And I was called to work on February 1, 1931 and I never did any carpenter work.

INT: Now did your, it sounds like your background as you were growing up was much, I mean if you were a newspaper editor and a teacher and had learned the embalming trade from your father and then done that in the service, it doesn't sound like a very construction oriented background.

CA: No, there was no construction background connected with it except that I had had some college training and some mathematics.

INT: I see, now where did you go to college?

CA: At the University of Minnesota 1914 and '15.

INT: I see.

CA But, but at any rate, on, coming into contact with Mr. Fairchild and the chief inspector Mr. Cooper, they gave me every opportunity for advancement just as fast as I was able to understand and carry on the work.

And, ah, before we, I may get a little mixed up on the dates here, but it seems to me that it was in, in the spring of 1932 that we had completed most of the real construction work at the Twin City locks and I was given the opportunity of taking the job as a clerk on one of the dredges. As I understand it, we had three dredges at that time working up and down the Mississippi digging out the 9-ft. channel, and I was, I got the job as a clerk on the dredge Cahaba. We were moved around by either one of the two steamboats at that time — the USS Eleanor or the General Allen. And throughout the summer, why, I was with the crew up and down the river on the dredge. Along in the fall, it seemed to me that I would be out of work. But one evening as we were pulling into the, the boatworks at Fountain City, WI, why the word came that I should pack my gear and board the General Allen which I did. And that night, we went up to Alma, WI where Mr. Fairchild again was the chief engineer in building the, of the lock and dam, and I was assigned as inspector on the locks.

INT: Now what did you inspect?

CA: The actual construction.

INT: So the concrete work and the pilings?

CA: Oh yeah.

INT: Everything?

CA: Yeah. The setting of lines and grades and seeing to it that the specifications were followed as far as reinforcing and condition of the forms and ah, a really full, the full job of inspecting. I had nothing to do with the concrete, however. That was a separate, ah, separate inspectors on that. But

also, ah, during this summer, they were building the channel markers which were separate really, constructive units along the stream of the Mississippi. Now I don't remember just how far, but at any rate, I was appointed as the inspector on the construction of these channel markers. And then, the dam at Chippewa Falls, I remember that that went out and a flood of water came down -

INT: When would this have been?

CA: The Mississippi and interfering considerably with the construction. But as luck would have it we were about through at the channel markers at that time. But on completion of the, it seems to me, it was in the fall of '33 that we were about through on, with the inspection on the locks and I thought that along with the rest of them that I would be laid off, because there was, the other locks and dams had not been fully certified for construction. But I was fortunate in being kept on the payroll and offered the opportunity of going up to the Headwaters on the Mississippi.

INT: I see.

CA: And in the fall of '33, I believe, I'm sure, I moved the family to Gull Lake Dam. And it's a very small dam, and during the period of drought which occurred at that time, there was practically nothing to do as far as the operation of the dam was concerned. There was this stipulation, and that is whereas I had been advanced to \$2000 a year as an inspector, I was reduced to \$1320 a year as a damtender.

INT: That was a great, that was a very great pay cut, wasn't it?

CA: And in addition to that, there was \$10 a month or \$120 a year taken off for use of the buildings as I recall. In spite of the fact that any repairs to be made, I had to make them.

INT: Out of pocket?

CA: No, no, no, the government furnished all the materials, but nevertheless I did the work.

INT: How long were you at Gull?

CA: Well, I was at Gull until the summer of '7, I believe it was. Come to think of it again, it must have been '34, fall of '34 when I got to Gull and, and then the, it seemed at that time as if the, at least there was, the reservoirs were more or less places for the officers to relax.

INT: I wanted to ask a little bit about that, it seems that -. What was the story there, was it like a, people and their families came up a lot, or -?

CA: Well, not to my knowledge. What happened at Gull Lake and I can't speak for any of the other dams or what happened there. But what happened at Gull Lake was that we were required, that is my wife was required to cook for and take care of the quarters. The officers had a separate building for quarters, but at set prices, that were set by the Corps of Engineers. And the reason for that was at the time, the roads were bad, travel by automobile was not good, and the officers often had, even at that time and previous to this time, had been required to stay for several days at each site on inspection. And that, of course, was official. Where my wife objected was when one of the Major's wives, really who were not up there on inspection, asked her not only to furnish meals, but to do their personal laundry. Well she was not under contract by the Corps of Engineers as I was, and she absolutely refused. The result of that was that the Major and his wife departed hastily for St. Paul again, and I regretted, in some ways, and yet I thought my wife was perfectly in the right of not becoming a servant to any of the officers who were not up there on inspection. But the result was that, there was no animosity waged against me or my wife.

INT: There was not a problem?

CA: No problem. In other words, it was the beginning of strict inspection by the officers, and the end of any recreational trips as I see it.

INT: Do you remember when this, this was when you were at Gull?

CA: This was at Gull.

INT: So this would have been in the mid '30s sometime?

CA: Well this was in, probably in 1935 because, ah '35. See, I left Gull then for Pokegama in the summer of 1937. But while at Gull, there were a great many things to do.

INT: What, I say, with the low water, what did you do?

CA: Well, for one thing, the, at that time the government was, had all kinds of work programs, and among them was called the National Youth Administration. And there were, I forget how many, 4 or 5 high school dropouts that were assigned to me to teach them what I could about, actually what we did was, we pulled stumps out of the lawn, we, in landscaping, and then we put in a drywell in addition to the sewage system from the dwelling.

INT: Now what is a drywell?

CA: Well, a drywell, the water from the sewage, from the sewer, that is, from the house runs into the drywell, where it evaporates or seeps into the ground.

INT: So it's like an open septic system or something?

CA: That's right, yeah.

INT: Now I assumed that you all had septic systems of some sort in the -?

CA: Well they do now, but they didn't at that time.

INT: I see, I see. I suspected the Corps wasn't running a pipe into the river, but I didn't know what they were doing.

CA: Well, I think we were at that time -

INT: I see.

CA: And we made the change, that is as I remember. But at any rate, in building this drywell, we had to cut through the poured concrete foundation of the dwelling, which I think was about 8 inches thick. And in cutting the hole through to run the pipes through, we used any number of cold chisels and there's where the blacksmith shop came in handy.

INT: That was still there?

CA: Oh yes, that was one of the main pieces of equipment that I really enjoyed, was the blacksmith shop. I had learned how to temper steel, and we reshaped those chisels. And I taught the boys, ah, tempering steel, among other things.

INT: Now did the boys live with your family, or was there a bunkhouse?

CA: No, they were members of families in the immediate area, rural families.

INT: Okay, so they weren't from somewhere else?

CA: No.

INT: They were from right in your -?

CA: They were right there, yeah. But, then, I don't remember just how long they were there, but part of my work, too, was in keeping the dwelling warm. We burned full 4-foot sticks of wood, 4-foot cordwood sticks.

INT: Big furnace.

CA: Yes, and in those big houses, the heating was really, was really something, that took up a lot of your time. Another thing we did in the winter time, in January, I cooperated with the resort people around the lake in putting up ice. We had, we had an ice house at Gull there, where we put in 600 cakes of ice.

INT: Now, is this for your personal use in the summer?

CA: This is for the personal use and the officers who caught fish, and I cleaned the fish, and packed them in ice for them to go back.

INT: My goodness. So it was, essentially what the fish guides did for paying customers?

CA: Yeah, but, and then there were other details to be taken into consideration there. I was sent out on trips to inspect various lowlands that had been flooded and that the people were making use out of.

INT: How would that be? What use would people make of them?

CA: Well, well, during the driest season they planted gardens; the farmers planted hay.

INT: Oh, so it's good muck and very rich land?

CA: That's right, it was, on ground where the Corps of Engineers held flowage rights. And when the water began to come back, these people would be flooded out. And it seemed as if there were several complaints. Well, part of that was Mr. Walters had asked me to visit these places and make reports on them and that's all I had to do with it, see?

INT: But you mean people who, who kind of, for them it was kind of found land, and they were unhappy then when the water levels went back up again?

CA: That's right. Yes.

INT: Did you have much to do with, I understand that there were water improvement, water level improvement associations in those days, did you -?

CA: No, not at that time, not at that time. That was after I retired.

INT: Okay. Oh that the improvement -

CA: Yeah, the Headwaters, the Mississippi Headwaters Association, I think you are referring to.

INT: I know that there were some things in the '60s, but I thought that, I got the impression from talking to Wes Walters that there were a lot of hearings and things in the '30s, during this low water period.

CA: That's right. I had very little to do with that except to furnish reports to the office, and I assumed that Mr. Walters took care of all that. Oh yes, there were a great many hearings.

CA: Did people come to talk to you about it, or people who had cabins around the lakes, beating on your door?

CA: No, not too many. I knew, I got acquainted with all of those people, practically as you would neighbors. But as far as any official talks were concerned, I stayed clear of that; I had nothing to do with that at that time.

INT: Did you have much, one thing I am very curious about in career would kind of spanned, kind of pure damtending, so to speak, and then the recreation. Was how, did you know the resort owners in your neighborhood and did you socialize with them and did you work with them on projects because you all lived on the lake, or was there a separation?

CA: No, there was no separation. I socialized with, particularly after I got to Pokegama Dam. See, there was a peculiar order that the Corps, that the Colonel or the district engineer always got out. When there was a change of district engineers, the new district engineer sent a letter around to the damtenders, and I wish I could have kept a copy of that. I thought I had, but I missed it someplace. But nevertheless, we were required to be, to live on the reservoir. We were required to be there 7 days a week and on call 24 hours a day. And as I recall, we were not suppose to be permitted to leave the station without competent relief for more than 4 hours at any one time twice a week to get our supplies. Well, I can say now, that I don't of a damtender that could live up to that. In fact I didn't, but I never had any trouble.

INT: So you would go on a day trip or-, either for the Corps or for family business?

CA: That's right. Well, during periods of vacation, I did have to furnish someone who was competent to take the gage readings and take messages from the Corps of Engineers, but who was never really competent to operate the dam. But he was responsible, and he put up the flag and he took down the flag; he took the weather reports, and sent in those reports.

INT: Now who would you recruit for that kind of job?

CA: Well I had a neighbor, who was working part-time and often times out of work. His wife was a school teacher, and he took care of a little acreage, so that he was free actually to come over. Ed Drayton was very competent.

INT: Now was this at Pokegama or -?

CA: This was at Pokegama, yeah. At Gull Lake I, there, we had been criticized severely by some of the people for previous acts of the damtender. But I made friends out of this young man that had, whose family had been really injured, and I trained him in to look after the place.

INT: What had the problem been?

CA: I don't want to get into that, because I don't really remember the background there. But Ted Setula, once you became his friend, he was always a friend. And finally, when Wes Walters came over and got me in the summer of '37 to go over and take charge of the repair work at Pokegama, why Ted Setula stepped in and looked after until another man was there, you see.

INT: And then you moved from, so the way you moved into Pokegama was being asked to supervise repairs, and then you became the damtender?

CA: And then I became the damtender, yeah.

INT: Now did you have an assistant damtenders, or were there, was there anybody there besides you and your family?

CA: No, no.

INT: At either Gull or Pokegama?

CA: No, no.

INT: There wasn't an assistant?

CA: No, oh no, we were all alone. Independent duty, it was strictly alone.

INT: Can I ask you to do me a favor? Fiddle with this or with this; when you put your hand up and down the mike, it comes on the tape.

CA: Oh, oh, oh.

INT: So if, I do understand that people need to fiddle sometimes, to fiddle with something, anything but the microphone would be wonderful, if you can be comfortable, OK?

CA: well, now coming over to, the reason as I understand that I was brought over to Pokegama was that Mr. Walters was dissatisfied with how the work was progressing in the repair of Pokegama dam. There was leakage underneath the foundation, and that foundation as I understand had been put in about 1904.

INT: When they rebuilt?

CA: When they rebuilt yeah, from the 1884. So the first thing I did, Mr. Walter's had a drawing of how the dam had been built, and it seemed to me I detected where the problem was. So we stopped at the lumber yard on the way to the dam, and I got some material there that I thought I could use. And upon getting to the dam, why, the first thing I did was take this oakum as we call it.

INT: Now tell me what oakum is.

CA: It's a, it's a fiber that is soaked in creosote, and it becomes, it's waterproofing, is what it is. But it can be packed tight into places to waterproof.

INT: Does it look like moss or something, is that right?

CA: Well, it does. You can fluff it out to moss, which is what I did. I got down in between the abutments, where the water was leaking in from both ends. They had, the bulkhead was placed up in front of the opening, but they couldn't stop, that didn't stop the flow in the water.

INT: Just one second, Mr. Anderson, let me turn this over.

Tape 1, Side 2

INT: It's all -

CA: But they, they ah, the construction of the dam was such that they had placed a timber header and then covered it with concrete. But this timber header had deteriorated to the point of where the water was coming in from both ends from all along the dam. Well, by getting down in underneath and packing the source of that water, why, we had it stopped. And with the water stopped to the point at least we could place concrete, and that way I was transferred to the, and stayed until not quite the finish of the job. But the, I forget when it was, toward fall. At any rate why, the family and I were moved to Pokegama Dam personally, permanently.

INT: Now did you, one thing I've just been wondering as you've been telling me about is whether, it sounds like your family lived in the Cities for a while and on the lower and on the upper Mississippi.

CA: Well, they lived in Minneapolis while, for the most part, while I was at Alma, although we did move from Minneapolis to Nelson, WI.

INT: For a while.

CA: For a while, until I was through at Alma, and then we moved up to Gull Lake.

INT: Did your family find it difficult to live up in north; were they lonely, or were they use to having more to do -?

CA: Well, they had plenty to do. You see, at Gull Lake, it was expected that you should raise a garden; you should make a part of your living. Since there was so little to do on the dam, you should make a part of your living off of the ground, and this we did to the fullest extent.

INT: Did you keep animals?

CA: Yes, I did.

INT: So you kept chickens?

CA: We kept chickens; we kept ah, I finally, I bought cattle at that time; I bought a cow for \$25.

INT: You mean a milk cow?

CA: A milk cow, and then we increased that. We had, before I left there, we had 4 cows and we had 13 head of young stock growing up there.

INT: Now, did you take these with you?

CA: I bought calves at \$1 a piece from farmers that didn't want to raise them because the prices were so low. But -

INT: And these were for your table?

CA: Oh yeah, sure.

INT: Did you take your animals with you to Pokegama?

CA: No, I sold them, that is, except the cow. I brought one cow with me to Pokegama. But, the work at Pokegama became full-time, and, of course, when the war broke out, there was just no time at all to -.

INT: Did you get a raise in pay?

CA: Finally. Yes, I did.

INT: When did that happen?

CA: I don't remember, but I remember talking to Wes. I got a raise in pay, yes, I did, when I went to Pokegama. I think it went from \$1320 to \$1500, but then 10% was held back for use of the house for the buildings, but there was a little increase, anyway. But at Pokegama, we had also a good barn, chicken coop, and the boys were in the 4-H club and they kept the chickens and they had sheep, and -

INT: Now did your wife, was your wife a school teacher, is that right?

CA: After we got to Pokegama, the war came on; there was a shortage of teachers. And my wife was, of course, she was graduate of Winona.

INT: The state teachers college?

CA: Oh yes. And had been, well in fact, we had both been teaching school out in Wyoming.

INT: Oh, is that how you met?

INT: No, we were married at that time. She was teaching school in Braham when I was the editor of the Braham Journal. There, why, I decided to get out of the newspaper business, because of politics. I'm no politician.

INT: I see.

CA: It ruined my eyes for one thing, and I wanted to go west anyway. Well in fact, I started out for Chicago to take a course in linotyping, because we had been setting all our type, by hand, and it just too much. So I told the school teacher that I was keeping company with that I was going. Well, she said, if you are going, I'm going, too. And I thought, well we better get married then - which we did.

We went to Chicago, and I found that the school was filled up. I would have to wait three months. Rather than do that, why we cranked up the Ford coup that I had and we drove to Denver. And at Denver, I went into business in the Allied Printing Business, ruling machine and then the rulers suddenly left me with a machine that wasn't quite paid for, that I couldn't run. We couldn't get another operator. So we hocked our wedding silver and we went up to Gillette, WY where my wife had made arrangements for teachers. We both had country schools out there, but it wasn't long before they brought her into Gillette. And we stayed there for about two years, and then came back to Minnesota. I was, ah, had several different jobs until I got in with the Corps of Engineers.

INT: Um, I see. Now, when you were -, um, were you aware of other people kind of doing the same thing you were, in the sense of being a veteran and looking to government service in the late '20s and the early '30s when times were hard. Was that a common kind of thing?

CA: Oh yes. There were lots of us out of work. After WWI, there was really no compensation for WWI veterans. It wasn't until I was at Gull Lake in 1936 that I cashed in the insurance that I had with the War Department. And this amounted to \$1575, and I bought a brand new Ford automobile, and since then I have never had a secondhand car. [Laughs] No. I always had a new car, but, oh, there are a lot of details like that that you get into. I worked on the railroad and, that is on the section, you know straightening track and so forth, between school terms. I've done a lot of things.

INT: Yeah, well, I just have noticed is that I've talked to a lot of people, um, I think you are the oldest person that I've talked to; I think you are the only veteran of WWI that I've talked to in this series of interviews about the Corps and about the

Headwaters. But other men for instance, who just got out of college or were just graduating from high school in the late '20s or in early '30s when times were hard, there seems to have been a group of people who kind of moved into government service um, as kind of a sure thing in difficult times.

CA: That's right, it was a last resort - was to go back to government service.

INT: So you really spent the '20s trying all sorts of things and then?

CA: Yup, yup. But it was, it turned out to be the best thing for me as far as that goes, because I had, with the Corps of Engineers, while I can tell you times that were really hard, I mean physically tough. I didn't think some of the days I'd get through there, on the, I operated Pokegama dam in the winter time. We didn't know anything about windchill, but out there on the dam, chipping ice to get the stop planks removed and fulfill the requirements of the Corps in -30 below zero weather. [Pauses]

INT: You can still remember it, huh?

CA: Yup.

INT: Did you have to do that everyday?

CA: No, not everyday, fortunately. But there were days when it was really rough.

INT: Every damtender has mentioned stoplogs in the wintertime as the worst thing.

CA: Oh yes, yup. And it's one, I - I regret that the district engineers didn't see that we should have been entitled to more time for recreation. That they held us so tight, seven days a week, on call 24 hours a day. Finally, I was the one who kicked over the traces on that after the war.

INT: When did that happen?

CA: I don't remember the date, probably in the 1970 - well, or 1952 or 53. Any rate, what actually happened was that I always thought that this order came from Washington, D.C., that this was the part of the damtender, if you wanted the job, this is what you had to do. And that through all the years that had been my feeling, and I really felt guilty when I went into Grand Rapids. I directed the choir in our church; I played with the city band; I belonged to the American Legion first and then with the Veterans of Foreign Wars, and I felt guilty about that.

But here, one, I can't tell you the date, but there was a Captain who came up on inspection, and I, I think I had made it

a point of telling every officer that came up how dissatisfied I was with that regulation. And this Captain said, well, I don't think that's anything, except your local district engineer; I don't think that comes from Washington, D.C. at all. Well, after he had gone, I wrote to Mr. Walters and I wanted permission to take this matter up with the Chief of Engineers in Washington, D.C. I had to go through channels. Mr. Walters, of course, took it up with the District Engineer. The District Engineer came up to Pokegama Dam, and we talked it over. And I was afraid at that time then, that I was going to be let out. I didn't know how they would do it, but I know they can do it. So after he left, I had made application for a firm in Minneapolis that was advertising for engineers to Africa.

INT: Oh my goodness.

CA: Building airfields. And I went down to Minneapolis, took the day off and went to Minneapolis, interviewed and I was accepted, because I could run on a level, I could run a transit, I could set lines and grades. And I did everything except take the physical examination and sign up. I thought, well, if I'm let out from the Corps of Engineers, this is what I'm going to do. And the boys, of course, had been in the service; they were graduated from the University of Minnesota. So they were really on their own, and my wife, of course, was still teaching. She was principal of the, one of the grade schools in Grand Rapids. But what happened was, within 30 days, I was put on a 40 hour week.

INT: Oh, really.

CA: I was paid overtime when necessary for work on Saturdays and Sundays.

INT: Did the same thing happen to all the other damtenders?

CA: I, I think all the other damtenders were given the same thing.

INT: I see.

CA: So, that really settled that question.

INT: So you didn't go to Africa after all.

CA: No, I didn't go to Africa [Laugh].

INT: Now, was Mrs. Anderson ready to Africa with you?

CA: No, no.

INT: No, she was going to stay and be a principal.

CA: She would have stayed here. Yeah, yeah. See, the boys were gone, and she wanted to fill out her term of teaching, see, get her retirement.

INT: Yeah. Oh, that's interesting.

CA: So I stayed on and ah, there were -. Until in '58, why ah, I had a little over 30 years with the -. You see, my, my ah, naval service counted toward my retirement. But at Pokegama, at the outbreak of the war, you see, why I was given also -.

INT: Leech Lake, I understand.

CA: The operation of Leech Lake Dam.

INT: Now, did that happen because another damtender went into the war, or -?

CA: No, they moved him. It was difficult to get damtenders at that time. But the damtender at Gull Lake was ah, I don't remember, he, he was moved to one of the other dams. I think they figured that Leech Lake was the one that could be ah, open. So I hired an Indian by the name of Fred Beaulieu to read the gages and take care of the flag.

INT: Ah, hah.

CA: He was pretty well educated. He was a graduate of one of the Indian schools. He could operate a typewriter. And I also interviewed a retired farmer, but, ah, he didn't have the qualifications that the Indian had.

INT: Mum hum.

CA: But this added to my responsibility.

INT: Now, how often did you go over to the Leech Lake Dam yourself?

CA: Well, it, it varied. It started out with three times a week, and then it became every day. But there were many, many things to be done at Leech Lake that couldn't wait.

INT: What kinds of things that -?

CA: Well, for instance, we had a, this bog, a -

INT: Ah hah.

CA: The rainfall came back -.

INT: This would have been in the early '40s -?

CA: Yeah, this bog lifted up. We estimated at least 10 acres of bog. But before that, the Corps gave me the ah, the order to take out these pilings with dynamite. And I don't remember how many there were, but ah, [laughs] I didn't know anything about dynamite. But there was a recluse, they ah, I knew a Swede. Close to Pokegama Dam, who came up quite often, visited with me, who knew all about dynamiting. I hired him. We made just four

trips up there, but in those four trips I learned the, what to do and what not to do with dynamite [laughs]. And then the office informed me that he was not a citizen of the United States, and I had to pay him out of my own pocket for that.

INT: Now why, why did, why would you have to be a citizen to do some contract work for the Corps?

CA: You were not permitted to hire anyone who was not a citizen of the United States. Yeah. But I did have a young man from Cohasset that ah, I hired then, to go with me.

INT: Cohasset?

CA: Yeah, Cohasset is just a little town on Highway 2 about ah, three miles west of the Pokegama Dam, yeah. But, ah, at any rate, this was in the wintertime, and to blast out these, I used to take and ah, take heavy wire and make rings, tie four sticks of dynamite on to the rings and then we'd chip the ice away from the piling and when we got up to the dam and ah, I'd attach the fuse. We didn't have an electrical charge; we had to burn a fuse.

INT: And run, huh?

CA: And get out of the way [laughs]. But the fuse was waterproof, and you could waterproof the fuse and one stick, and it was really quite a sight when we [laughs] -.

INT: So there would be a lot of, it looked like a mine or something wouldn't it? Yeah.

CA: Cut those pilings off. Yeah. And the same way, that is with the rock filled cribs. Now, these, these were really heavy items to dispose of.

INT: What did you, you know, what did you do with all this stuff then?

CA: Ah, well, they ah, people around, they ah, picked up the piling and dragged them out for wood, for fireplace wood. But the rock filled cribs were simply scattered in the river.

INT: I see.

CA: Ah, I used about 20 sticks of dynamite in each crib. There was-

INT: Why were they not needed anymore?

CA: Well, the reason was on account of this bog; the bog had bothered years before. And they figured that by stopping it before it got the dam, it would be easier to dispose of. But what happened was, that as the bog came down against these piling, it would roll up and go clear to the bottom. And they had a terrible time in cutting it up or loosening it, and it

was better to let the bog come down against the dam, and then cut it out.

INT: Than to have it roll under instead.

CA: That's right.

INT: Then the bog -

CA: And it would roll up or under at the dam.

INT: I see.

CA: But one could stand on the catwalk and with a hay knife attached to a long pole, you could cut it up, and you were right on solid ground in cutting. Otherwise, to cut up the main part of the bog, they ah, the office furnished me with a small plywood boat. And I had a four foot crosscut saw, and I could have the boat on the bog and drag it along, and by sawing it, I cut this bog up in strips. Some of them were a couple hundred feet long. And then I'd go back to the dam, open up the log sluice, which was real wide -.

INT: Uh, huh.

CA: And the rush of water would take that strip right through like the speed of an express train. [clock chimes]

INT: Now, how long did it take you to get that bog down the -.

CA: Well, mostly all, most of the summer I was up there.

INT: This would be '41, '42?

CA: This was in '42, yeah.

INT: Ok.

CA: And, ah, I was in, I did hire a 4-F Indian boy to help me on that, and he worked very well until he got his first paycheck. In two weeks, we were paid every two weeks. And then he disappeared.

INT: Was that a common problem?

CA: That's a common problem with that, yeah.

INT: So, ah -

CA: So, actually, I did that all alone.

INT: Did you get to know people in the Leech Lake band, or com-, the Indian community very well?

CA: Oh, yes. Well, not too well. But ah, we did rent the house to one of the merchants in Federal Dam, yeah.

INT: I know, I heard about that. Now did that ever happen before or since, or how did that come to happen?

CA: Well, the office just figured that it wasn't, and it wasn't, a good idea to leave the house alone. In other words, what had happened to the house was that some of the plastering had come loose, and this had to be replaced. Now, Henry Dart was sent up from ah, ah, oh what's the dam just below. Names, I should know that as well as I know my own.

INT: Not ah -

CA: Near McGregor.

INT: Sandy?

CA: Sandy.

INT: Ok.

CA: Henry Dart was sent up to help me on that. And there was a man who should have never been a damtender. He was perfect. He had more skill than most anyone that I've run into. Henry Dart was a, was a wizard when it came to repair work and carpentry work, or whether it was rough or whether it was fine, but ah, and in painting the same way. We repaired that building; in fact, Henry did most of it.

INT: Mum hum.

CA: And ah,

INT: Now why did you say he should never be a damtender. I should think those would be wonderful qualifications?

CA: Well, he was too good for damtender. He really was. And he never, as far as I know, Henry never -. In fact, in the history [Merritt's Creativity, Conflict and Controversy: A History of the St. Paul District U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, 1979], Henry Dart was never mentioned. And he was appointed the head damtender by the office for a while. That didn't work out too well.

INT: How come, was it just -?

CA: Well, I don't know; it just didn't work out. But, ah, now Henry Dart supervised putting in the automatic gages at ah, Pokegama there.

INT: When was that done? Can you remember?

CA: Must of been done about 1954 or '55.

INT: Right toward the end of your time.

CA: Yeah.

INT: That must have made things a lot easier. Is that right?

CA: Yeah. That was done, I think, in order to keep a continuous record.

INT: Mum hum.

CA: You see, before that time when the damtenders were on seven days a week on call 24 hours a day, they could set the hours. The hours were to read the gages 6 in the morning and 6 at night.

INT: Mum hum.

CA: Punctually. Well, seven days a week you were responsible for that. Well, that simply could not go on.

INT: So the idea of mechanizing the guide was to get this automatic reading.

CA: The automatic release -. The technology was there; the instruments were there; why shouldn't they be used?

INT: Mum hum.

CA: And then we were put on the 40 hour week.

INT: Mum hum.

CA: See, like anybody else.

INT: Let me just, I need to put a new tape in.

CA: Oh

Tape 2, Side 1

INT: Well, were other things mechanized during the years that you worked at Pokegama? The gages would have been a big difference. It would have been a matter of reading a record then instead of physically doing it yourself. But, for instance, were the gates mechanized or anything like that?

CA: No, no, not while I was there.

INT: Ok, now -

CA: The, the only improvement that was made on the dam, I was called upon to do. And that was to put up protection railings, and that meant drilling holes in the concrete, several hundreds of them. I sat there during one summer, just drilling holes in the concrete, putting in lead anchors and ah, putting up those railings. [This was done sometime in the 1940s to the best of Mr. Anderson's recollection.]

INT: This would be for -

CA: We didn't have any, any equipment like they have today where you simply drill, drill down with a tool into the concrete and bingo. But I sat there with that star drill and a hammer to put in the lead anchors. And ah, but now, the other things at Pokegama that they kept me busy with were, we had what, in the old lumber days, that is when they were sluicing through logs, they had what they called a bear trap dam.

INT: And what does that mean? I know the term, but I really don't know what it means.

CA: Well, in the log sluice, the log sluice is the big one.

INT: It's about twice as big as the others, isn't it?

CA: It's about twelve feet wide. Yeah. I ah, you would pull out those stop logs and the bear trap was ah, was on a swivel sort of, so that the pressure of the water would force it down and/or release it.

INT: Now what did it do?

CA: You had a valve that you could close off the water with. You could open the valve, and that would release this bear trap, and the ah, the logs could go through. Or, if you wanted to shut them off, you closed the valves and the bear trap would come up and hold the logs from going through, see.

INT: I see, I see.

CA: So, it was, well, that, the facing on that was, it had been oak and Mr. Walters asked if I could get some white oak anyplace, which I located with an old timber man up in Cohasset.

INT: Ah, huh.

CA: And I refaced that valve.

INT: Now -

CA: Well, that meant getting down into the void and chipping and cutting off all the old rivets and ah -.

INT: Now, did you have to unwater it somehow?

CA: No, that's -

INT: You could just raise it up and work on it that way?

CA: Yeah. Well, no, it was in the void with the stop planks in place, you see.

INT: Ok.

CA: But, ah, it took me quite a while to get that done [circa 1940s, also].

INT: I see, I see.

CA: And then, of course, we had leakage in one wall; that is the approach to the dam. The water was coming and going underneath, going around underneath. I forget, this was in, it happened in the fall of -. When did the war break out? '41?

INT: Mum hum.

CA: '41, yes. At any rate, I was instructed to make tests with permanganate and potash. And, to color the water and determine just where the leakage was.

INT: Where it was coming through. I see.

CA: Well, we determined that it was coming around the very first abutment. So what had to be done was, that that had to be opened up and a new wall be put in place. And that's what we did. I hired, first I hired one crew there and ah, let's see. No, no, that was the original where I had two crews. But we worked on this until in December. In fact, the wall consisted of vertical timbers of 3 x 10 creosoted timbers, and they were doubled. So, we had to excavate clear down to bedrock, then place these timbers and then pour the concrete in the footing to seal that off. And then we mixed volclay and as the clay or backfill was being put in place, we simply worked a sheet of ah, plywood up; we had the void was formed by 2x4's. We filled that void will volclay [a form of volcanic clay].

INT: What's that? Is this a -

CA: It's a, it's mined out in, ah, eastern Mon-, eastern Wyoming. It makes a perfectly waterproof seal even when mixed with a certain amount of gravel. Well, I had determined the amount of gravel to use in that, and I did the mixing. But I had the crew there that handled it. But as they, we had to have a tent in which we had the backfill, so that it wouldn't freeze. And we heated that tent with salamanders.

INT: What do you mean? You mean the iron -?

CA: Yes.

INT: Heated iron.

CA: Yeah. Sheet iron.

INT: I see.

CA: Well, what is it there, we used for heating, ah, coke.

INT: Charcoal, not charcoal but coke.

CA: No, we used coke to heat it with, you see. Well anyway, I used to get up at 4 o'clock in the morning and ah, see to it that those salamanders were re-, refilled so that that clay wouldn't freeze during the night because this was in December.

INT: Now why would you do work like that in December?

CA: Well, in making the backfill, we couldn't put frozen chunks up against the wall and hope that that was going to be tight.

INT: I understand that; I'm, I'm curious why you didn't wait for warmer weather to do the job.

CA: Well, because of the leakage.

INT: I see, you were depending upon the ice to keep the water out -

CA: That's right.

INT: So that you could make the -

CA: Yeah, yeah.

INT: 'Cus I know that in some areas, people don't want to construction in the wintertime -

CA: That's right.

INT: Because of the problem with the materials.

CA: Oh, yeah. But this had to be done. That's all. I think we finished up, well, December 7th came out, and the war was declared. I remember that, because we worked right on through.

INT: My goodness.

CA: An ah, I got my vacation, I think, a couple days before Christmas.

INT: Ah.

CA: But another thing that happened there, that was be- or later on, 1948, I believe. The papermill dam washed out.

INT: I was going to, OK, now tell me, that meant what? Flood, or -

CA: Well, you see, papermill was dependent upon the government to release a certain amount of water for their, ah -

INT: To keep that mill - yeah.

CA: Making of paper. And when they didn't need that much water, they had a dam that they could impound and, and also in impounding that water, they had storage space for their ah, their, the timber that they made paper out of, you see.

INT: They had to keep it wet.

CA: Yeah. So they had, I, somewheres about 10,000 cords of pulpwood -

INT: Sitting in that water.

CA: Sitting in that there, yeah. And they, when the dam went out, and that pulpwood went on down river -

INT: Toward your dam, right?

CA: Oh, sure. Well, the thing I had to do was to close up the government dam. Of course when they gave me word that they, that they ah, the papermill dam went out, I called the office immediately, and ah, told them what had happened. And it took some little time, I don't know, maybe an half an hour before I got the word; by all means, close up the dam.

INT: Now how far is it between -

CA: Three miles.

INT: That's not very far, is it?

CA: No, no, it isn't.

INT: In terms of all that wood traveling toward -

CA: Yeah.

INT: What -, did it damage the dam to have, the government dam?

CA: Not our dam. Oh, no, it didn't hurt us at all.

INT: Did it overflow on -

CA: No, no, it didn't overflow.

INT: Oh, oh. But there was an enormous amount of wood floating in that three mile stretch then.

CA: Yeah, yeah. Yeah, well, of course the papermill, later on, I imagine, they picked up some of that way downstream, but they lost some of that, yeah.

INT: Did, did you talk to the people at the papermill a lot? Was that a -

CA: Oh, yeah.

INT: Did you -

CA: Oh, we worked together quite a bit.

INT: Ah, hah. Did that require a lot of adjusting and -?

CA: Not too much. Not, not in favor of the papermill particularly. They could adjust their dam accordingly, see. So, actually there was always good feeling between the papermill and the government dam. But that particular time when I rushed down to ah, close up, to get these stop logs over, and dump them in. Now in order to get them so that they were sealed together, we had about a 12 ft. 4 inch pipe with a, what I called an expander on one end.

INT: Mum hum.

CA: Now the fellows before my time were bigger men, stronger men. They could evidently take that pipe in their hands and pack down the stop planks with it. First on one end and they'd go around and pack it down on the other end. I couldn't do that. So I took that ah, big pipe up to the shop and I drilled 3/4 inch holes in it a foot apart and then I got a rod to go through that so that instead of gripping the pipe, I gripped the rod, and I could brace it against my shoulder then. And that way I could tamp the logs down.

INT: Oh my goodness.

CA: Well, this particular time when I rushed down in a hurry, I knew the papermill was in trouble. I forget how much water we were discharging, how many cubic feet a second. But, I reached over to get these logs up to the edge and dump them in, and I twisted my back.

INT: Mum.

CA: Well, I crawled on hands and knees to get these logs dumped in, but I could not tamp them down. So I got back up finally, and called the papermill again and told them what had happened to me and [laugh], they sent up three men immediately.

INT: To help you.

CA: To tamp those logs down.

INT: Describe for me how many stop logs, I mean, are we talking a dozen or more?

CA: Oh yes, oh, yes.

INT: How long would it take you to close up the dam if you had to put in every one of those logs?

CA: Well, it would have taken me, if I had been able to do it, it would have taken me probably an hour.

INT: To completely close it down.

CA: Um hum. To close up the dam, yeah.

INT: And would it take you that long to open it up if you had to -?

CA: Oh, yes.

INT: How do you get stop -. You know, I get the idea of throwing a stop log into its shoot and then tamping it down. How do you get them back up again? Do you have a, a chain on it?

CA: Well, well, this is another job the damtender had to do, and that is to shape these logs. Now, most of these came from the west. They were western spruce, because they, they seemed to last longer.

INT: They took the water better?

CA: That's right.

INT: Did you have creosote or anything in them?

CA: No.

INT: No? They were just plain wood.

CA: Plain wood, yeah. But they were cut to the proper length. 9 feet 8 inches. And ah, you see, the sluices were 8 feet wide, and then there was a recess that the end of the stop log fitted into. And, well, the stop log of 9 feet 8 inches, why it just fit nicely in there. But they had to be mortised out on one, on the ends and a, a bolt. The Corps of Engineers sent me up a, the straight, ah, 5/8 inch ah, rods, and I would take and put those in the forge, heat them in the center and bend them into a U which we called a U bolt.

INT: Mum hum.

CA: And they were long enough so that, by drilling two holes then, in this recess clear through the log and then, ah, they would fit clear through and then you'd put the washers and nuts on the other end.

INT: I see.

CA: Which were also countersunk. So it really took quite a little time in making up those logs.

INT: Yes.

CA: Well then, we had a special hook that fitted, that you could put on the end of a pipe pull and let down. First we had ropes, and ah, then they finally put in a chain block that gave more leverage for me. But, ah, that hook was hollowed out on one end, so your pipe pull went into it, and that would fit down and grab the hook.

INT: And then you could lift.

CA: And that would, and lift them out, you see.

INT: How heavy would one of those logs be? Do you know?

CA: Well, I can tell you exactly, because what I used to do, even though I weighed, about that time, around a 125 to 128 pounds.

INT: My goodness.

CA: And I used to take these logs on my shoulder. I didn't have any other way of getting them down, from the warehouse to the dam, one at a time. And then those that were rotted out, in the wintertime we'd get down toward the bottom and pick out those that were rotted out in the ends, or weren't safe, and I'd bring those up and cut them up for wood. But I would take one of these down on my shoulders and bring one of the condemned ones back up to the wood pile, see. One day I took one of the big ones and put it upright on the scale that we had there. It weighed 135 pounds.

INT: Goodness. And that was dry?

CA: I couldn't lift it after that.

INT: [Laughs]

CA: That was the end of the - I used to drag 'em down behind the automobile [Laughs].

INT: Oh, goodness, goodness.

CA: But, ah -.

INT: That's a good sized -

CA: Yeah.

INT: Piece of wood. Now, ah, somebody told me, and I don't know if it's true or not, I mean I just don't know if it's something you would remember. That, that you had dealt with the Indians some on wild rice. Is that, did you have dealings with -?

CA: Oh, yes. You see, when I took over the operation of Leech Lake Dam, I would go up along the river road. It was about 50 miles one way, that way, and read the gages at Collins Bridge, Days High Landing, and ah, the ah, junction of the Ball Club and the Mississippi at ah, the ah, Goose Lake, and then on up and through the woods to Leech Lake and come back by the way of the highway.

INT: I see, so there was Highway 2, but you always didn't take it.

CA: Yeah. Now at Goose Lake, there was about 5,000 acres of wild rice. And every year the Indians were ah, very much dissatisfied with the Corps of Engineers, because they needed a change of water at times for the various high rice and the low rice.

INT: What's high rice and what's low rice?

CA: That's the way the rice grows.

INT: You mean different stages. Oh, you mean different kinds.

CA: Some of it grows this high, and some of it matures at lower level.

INT: I see.

CA: So when they're harvesting to lower rice, they don't want too much water. When they're harvesting the high rice, they want more water. So, the word came to me, that the colonel, I don't remember who it was at that time, he said, why don't we turn that over to Anderson and the Indians during the wild rice harvest. And that's what happened.

I would go up, by river, in the morning. I'd leave, get my gages readings, and the daily report done at Pokegama done before 7 o'clock and leave Pokegama at 7, take the gage, river readings on my way up, and the, get as far as Goose Lake, where the Indians were camped. And ah, they were in their wanigans as they called it. Several times I had breakfast with them there, with the chief and the, they had one, I wish I could remember the name of the, the Indian lady that really seemed to know more about wild rice than the chief himself. Because she was the one that would say, well, today we need a little more water, or today we don't want so much water. And at any rate, I would go up then and make the changes in the dam. And that way, why, we kept peace.

INT: Would, in these days, did the Indian people living in the area still have, like summertime camps on the lake, or did they pretty much live year round in -?

CA: No, they lived round. The Ball Club Indians were scattered pretty well, but they did come together during the wild rice harvest.

INT: I see.

CA: Sometimes that started in, in the latter part of August and continued on. They used to continue there for about three weeks. Because when the Indians went through the rice field, they didn't break the stems very often. They would simply tap the ripe rice out of the heads and later on they'd go back over this same area and get more rice.

INT: I see.

CA: One season there, right after the war, '46 I believe it was, the boys came back from the service and they ignored the Indians entirely. They went through there, and in a few days they had whipped that whole field to pieces.

INT: Now who -

CA: They had taken green rice, ripe rice, and everything else, because they didn't know any better.

INT: Now who were these -?

CA: Well, there no one; I remember the Indians standing there and just ah, gasping because their harvest was completely ruined.

INT: Who were the people who took it, though?

CA: And that year - Yeah. Well, I don't know. It seemed to me that the Indians had gotten in, in contact with the state and the conservation department, or Department of Natural Resources now, and they, they submitted regulations and ah, the game wardens used to enforce the rules there.

INT: Mum hum.

CA: But that one year was almost a complete loss for the Indians.

INT: My goodness.

CA: On the wild rice. And the buyers that bought that rice, I knew one of them, that bought a great deal of the rice and it molded for him. He couldn't harvest it. It was just a dead loss, because it was green, see. The Indians knew how to handle it, you know.

INT: Did, did other people in the area harvest the rice much, or was it mainly Indians?

CA: Well, they, I don't believe that they did to any extent without the Indians consent.

INT: Mum hum.

CA: I knew the chief very well, Ed Wilson, because later on, after I had retired and I was president of the Izaak Walton League at Grand Rapids, I got chief Ed Wilson to come in as an honorary member of the Izaak Walton League, and ah, in that way, why, we were pretty good friends with the Indians there. I always respected the Indians' rights, and ah, never had any trouble with them.

INT: I didn't know, I talked to Mr. Lego, whose family had rented the house during the war -

CA: Oh, yeah.

INT: And he told me, I, I never knew that ah, that he and his brother now, and then earlier, his father apparently, had bought a lot of that wild rice at the lakes and it had gone to places like Uncle Ben.

CA: Is that right.

INT: And I just hadn't known that that -

CA: Was this Russell Lego?

INT: I talked to Merton, but I guess Russell's his brother who has the paddies and -

CA: Russell Lego was the family that rented the government house.

INT: He talked, Merton talked, I guess Russell, Sr. must have been the father of Russell, Jr. and Merton, and Merton's the man I talked to and he, he remembers growing up in that house very fondly.

CA: Is that right, yeah, yeah.

INT: He, he described all of the, ah -

CA: The rooms -

INT: He didn't describe the rooms actually; he described, it's interesting. He was a boy in school then, and he described the outside, about how they, how the boathouse used to be in the front of the house in those days, and he and his brother would go out right on the lake from school. And he kept animals in the barn and it was very much an outside place for him and -
[clock chime]

CA: [During the above paragraph of the interviewer, Mr. Anderson would continually say yeah, yeah.] Well, they rented the house, but then when the war was over, why I don't know, just, I was relieved of it.

INT: Mum hum.

CA: At that time, yeah.

INT: Now, I understand that your house at Pokegama was changed.

CA: Oh yeah.

INT: It became a story and a half?

CA: That's right.

INT: Was that when your family was living in it?

CA: No.

INT: No?

CA: No, that was after I'd, I was ready to retire -

INT: Ah, hah.

CA: And we had ah, moved out. I'd bought a farm near Cohasset, and ah, in fact, I, we built the house out there. No, Henry Dart did the work on that [circa 1957]. He had the crew that cut that, the top off. I was still damtender at the time, but we didn't live in it.

INT: I see. It seems like an extraordinary thing to do.

CA: Yeah. It was.

INT: Why did they do it?

CA: [Laughs]

INT: Go ahead and tell me. What have you got to lose. [Laughs]

CA: It was just one of those things, yeah. Why did we have to work seven days a week on call, 24 hours a day?

INT: Yeah. The -

CA: Now, for some reason or another, when I was 75 years old, I received an additional \$20 a month in my retirement. I asked Mr. Walters about that. Now, and as I recall, he said that that was because of the overtime that I put in forty years ago.

INT: Oh my goodness. My goodness, so that everyone that worked on one of those seven days a week jobs, maybe, got an extra.

CA: Yeah [laughing].

INT: My goodness. The -

CA: Well, at any rate, I was grateful for the \$20 [laughing].

INT: Yeah. Did the housing, I mean, I have, in fact I brought with me, several maps of Pokegama.

CA: Oh.

INT: I should have thought to bring Leech. I just didn't think of it.

CA: Yeah.

INT: But, ah, one of the maps is from 1937, which would have been just about the time your family moved there.

CA: Yes. [maps rustling] We moved there in '34.

INT: Ok, um -

CA: '37 is when I left there.

INT: Pokegama, is when you left Pokegama?

CA: Yeah. No, not Pokegama. I'm thinking -

INT: Gull Lake.

CA: Oh, Pokegama. That's when we came there. [maps rustling] Oh, that was a big house. Oh -

INT: Now this is the way it shows the, ah, this is the 1937 map, and it shows warehouse, -

CA: Mum hum. That's right.

INT: And the dwelling.

CA: Yeah.

INT: And the officers quarters.

CA: Yeah.

INT: And barn.

CA: Right.

INT: And then where would the, would this be the chicken coop over here?

CA: Yeah, the chicken coop, this is the dwelling -

INT: Ok.

CA: And this is the chicken coop, right there.

INT: Now were all of those buildings there all the time that you lived there?

CA: Oh, yes.

INT: Did they change any of the physical -

CA: No, not while I was there, no, no. There's one thing isn't shown here, and that is the root cellar.

INT: Oh, where was the root cellar?

CA: The root cellar was right down along the riverbank opposite the ah, the ah, officers' quarters.

INT: Ah, hah.

CA: Right in here.

INT: It seems like a very, just so kind of on like with the -

CA: Yeah.

INT: On line kind of with the barn a little bit?

CA: Yeah, yeah.

INT: Ah, it seems like a very tidy kind of installation. Did you grow a lot of vegetables with your sons [indecipherable] and stuff -

CA: Oh, yes.

INT: And you -

CA: Quite a few vegetables right along here, in this area.

INT: Of course you were not -. In Pokegama you weren't too far from a town. Your family must have felt like they -

CA: Oh sure.

INT: Get anything they wanted.

CA: We did. That's why, after the boys went into the service [circa 1941, 1943], you see, they entered right from high school, I gave up gardening entirely. I just couldn't take care of it.

INT: You didn't have two teenagers eating you out of house and home, and you had two dams to tend and -

CA: Two dams to take care of and -

INT: And your wife was working at another job.

CA: I put in more 16 hour days there than I care to talk about.

INT: It must have been, with your wife working in the school; she didn't have a lot of time for housekeeping and things, either.

CA: Well, there wasn't much housekeeping to do. When we were, you know, evenings, why, we'd both dig into it.

INT: Do what needed to be done and -

CA: Sure, yeah. In fact, later on, before she re-. In 1946, she had cancer.

INT: Mum.

CA: And through the entire summer, was at the University Hospital here -

INT: All the way down here in the Cities?

CA: Minneapolis, yeah. And after that, why, she went back to teaching, insisted on it, and, but her health was not too good. And after she retired, see 19- ah, '64, she retired, I had already retired. Why ah, her health failed quite rapidly. We did a lot of traveling and ah, ah, we were up in Alaska, traveled. I bought a good automobile, a Buick Electra, and we traveled through the east; we traveled through the west; we were down in Florida, and ah, you know, tried to make the most out of it. But the last three and one-half years, she had suffered the second stroke and that, of course, practically paralyzed her right side.

INT: That's difficult, I'm sure.

CA: So, then, by that time we were on the tree farm up here [in Stanchfield, MN] and, but it finally really ended very suddenly. An aneurysm moved into the heart area, and one noon, why, she just went like that, yeah.

INT: Mum.

CA: But, ah, we had had 55 years together.

INT: Yeah, yeah.

CA: No, I don't regret the life with the Corps of Engineers at all, because even though sometimes it was, it used to make me wonder if I would ever get through it, why, ah, in spite of that, it was healthy. And I, I never got time on that to spend all the money, even what little I made.

INT: Uh huh.

CA: There was always a savings. And, and for that reason, why, I'm just tickled pink that I, [laughs] that I stayed with the Corps.

INT: That was a good decision for your family.

CA: Yeah.

INT: Great.

CA: And right now, I ah -. It's a, I've had some of the fellows over here and Christie has been over and ah, one of the other boys, and Wes Walters, of course, we get together.

INT: Now who's Mr. Christie? I don't think I know that name.

CA: Well, he was the office engineer at Alma, Wisconsin.

INT: Oh, and he's someone that you stay in touch with?

CA: Yes.

INT: Oh, you're going to have to tell me how to get in touch with him,-

CA: Well -

INT: Because I have photographs of him when he was a young man and -

CA: Ah, do you see that address book there?

INT: Is this it?

CA: No, no by the typewriter. Yeah.

INT: Oh.

CA: I think I have, I think I have his address here. (looks in book). I thought I got it anyway. Sure, Elmer Christianson.

INT: Elmer?

CA: Christianson.

INT: Christianson. Is that en?

CA: On.

INT: Ok.

CA: Yeah. At 1380 -

INT: 1380 -

CA: Frankson Avenue -

INT: Frankson Avenue -

CA: Yeah. And his telephone number is 644-2531.

INT: Uh huh. 2531, and that's here in Minneapolis?

CA: Yeah, no that's St. Paul. That's St. Paul. 1380 Frankson Avenue, St. Paul. Yeah.

INT: Ok, and it's Elmer -

CA: Christianson.

INT: Christianson. Oh, that's very exciting news because I'm looking for all these people.

CA: Mum hum. Oh yes, he ah, now -

INT: Now just let me look at my list of things.

CA: Ah, Christie and [pause].

INT: Did you um, did you have much to do with -. One thing that I wanted to ask was, while you were at Pokegama - did new resort facility, or recreation, the Corps to get started on recreation facilities. Did you have campers or anything like that?

CA: Very, very minor. Very minor. And people, when I came to Pokegama, people were accustomed to running all over the place. There was a law that prohibited fishing within 300 feet of the dam. And that was not enforced, in any way. It was dangerous, really, and there were, there was no way that you could keep people out of the place.

INT: 'Cus it's right on the highway.

CA: Yeah.

INT: Highway #2 coming out west, right? Out of Grand Rapids.

CA: They would drive right in with their cars and drive right down, just scattered all over.

INT: So -

CA: Well, now, one of the things that changed when I came there was that I had no idea that I would have to enforce any of the rulings. But the, in the reconstruction and the repair work that I had charge of, the public used to get in my way. That is, they were walking back and forth across the dam; they'd get out on the edge of abutments and sit there and fish. And the damtender paid no attention to them what-so-ever. The place was not marked 300 feet. In fact, I didn't know there was such a law at that time. But, it just so happened that I was having an argument with a couple of men who were standing there looking over from the abutment down below where the men were taking out the old timbers. And I wanted them to move on, and they didn't want to move. In other words, who the hell was I?

INT: Mum hum.

CA: And it just so happened that Mr. Walters and one of the, and the officers came on for a visit. And the officer took over, I don't remember his name, names go, took over immediately and told these fellows to get out, you know. And then he turned to me and he said, what's the matter. Don't you have any regulation? Can't you -. I said, I'm not a policeman here. I said, I'm just trying to get these fellows out of the way. Well, but who are all these people around here? I said, I don't have any idea. So they went up to see the damtender, and I, I don't know, but I thought then it was maybe up to me to chase these fellows off, which I did. But, I think that's one of the reasons why I was moved to that place, because the first

thing I did was to get in touch with the game warden, the state, and mark off 300 feet and set the signs. So that people would know they didn't have any right to be there.

INT: Now did that mean the people would come down a road through your place and go to the dam?

CA: Oh yeah.

INT: To fish even at the 300 feet?

CA: Well, they'd come off of the highway, see.

INT: Yeah.

CA: Well then, another thing we did, we didn't want to stop the public from making use of the place legally. That, that was never the idea.

INT: Mum hum.

CA: But we'd, I did build a fence and put in a gate at Mr. Walters' request. That is, we figured where that gate should be, so that people could not drive promiscuously and interfere with the operation of the dam, see. But they could, they did have a parking place there.

INT: Mum hum.

CA: And then we also determined that there were no boats to be taken above the dam that couldn't be carried in. Well, I remember the president of the Izaak Walton League, he came out with his boat and a light boat, and they carried it above the dam. But we discouraged people from putting in boats above the dam, because of the flow of water.

INT: Which was going to pull them toward it.

CA: Yeah. Against it, you know, against the dam there.

INT: Ah hah. So did people camp around the dam when you were there?

CA: No.

INT: No?

CA: No, they were not permitted to camp there, as long as I was there.

INT: Picnicking, or -

CA: No, no,-

INT: No.

CA: No picnicking.

INT: It was -

CA: Except if they wanted their lunches, they could open up ah, down alongside of the, they could, to a certain extent; they did picnic, that is, they would bring some of their lunches along.

INT: Right.

CA: While they were fishing or something like that, but it was not encouraged at that time.

INT: I see. Now, did, did, it sounds like it was a little bit public place for you and your family. Is that true, or that there were just a lot of people around in the summertime?

CA: Oh, yes, there were a lot of people around.

INT: Some of the -

CA: Oh, should say.

INT: Some of the other dams were more remote, I think.

CA: Yeah, and of course, that was one reason why I think that they had to plan on taking care of the public, because it was growing every year.

INT: Did you notice that as you were -

CA: Oh, yes, oh sure, yeah. It was growing every year.

INT: Was it mainly local people, or was it people from all over?

CA: Well, no -

INT: Or could you tell?

CA: Not too many local people. They were tourists, but ah, they came through with their all kinds of rigs, you know. Trailers, trailer, well toward the last, they began to have these ah, what do you call them, [laughs] -

INT: Oh, the RVs?

CA: That's right. Yeah.

INT: Ah.

CA: But there weren't too many of them, really, in 1958, at that time. I think those have grown in just the last 10-15 years here. But there are lots of them now; they are regular houses, you know.

INT: Yes, they are quite large. Yeah.

CA: I know my brother-in-law had one that was, ah, fitted up for, well, you could have lived in it in the wintertime even. Complete. And they used to drive south with it for several weeks, you know, yeah.

INT: Ok, ah, it looks like, let me ask -. Let me show you these pictures real quickly and ask if these are pictures from when your family -. These were taken in 1937. [Shuffling of Corps photographs of Pokegama Dam facility]. Let me turn this over.

Tape 2 - Side 2

INT: But I won't talk to you much longer, I know that I've been here a long time. Is that the way your family kept the place?

CA: Yeah, that's right.

INT: Yeah. I think those are dated September of '37. Would this have been when your family was in residence?

CA: Oh, yes. We were still there.

INT: Yeah, but this isn't -.

CA: Just a couple months before we left, though. '37.

INT: Oh, this is Pokegama; would you not have moved there, yet?

CA: Well, I think we were still, wait a minute; we just came there in '37. That's right.

INT: Would you have made the move by September, or -?

CA: Oh, yeah. Wait a minute. I don't know. I don't remember just when we moved.

INT: But it certainly was the year that you moved.

CA: But I think it was about September, because the repair work had not been finished and the office sent up an engineer to complete the work that I had started out there. But this is certainly just exactly the way it looked.

INT: Ah, hah. Did you keep um; it looks like there is a lot of lawn.

CA: There was quite a bit of lawn.

INT: Did you mow it? Did you have sheep? How did you -.

CA: No, no, we mowed it. Yeah. We had -

INT: With a hand mower?

CA: No, yes, a big heavy, hand mower, this is it, all this around here. Yeah, there was a lot of work on the grounds there, you know. But that was just incidental. In other words, cutting the lawn was - .

INT: Mum hum.

CA: Something that you did and never thought about.

INT: Mum hum. Yeah.

CA: It was just like shoveling snow in the wintertime.

INT: Right, yeah. Did um, did your family make many changes in the house, or did you just -.

CA: No, no changes in, at all, really. They had had a kitchen in this part here.

INT: It's kind of a back addition?

CA: Yeah, back addition. And that hadn't been made use of and we never made use of it. It just became a storage room.

INT: Oh, it was like a winter kitchen; it's like a summer kitchen or something?

CA: Yeah, something like that.

INT: And you just used an inside kitchen that was already in the house?

CA: Yeah, sure. Yeah, yeah.

INT: Did it have an inside pump? It must have.

CA: Oh, yes. Yes, the, the water system, that isn't shown here, but it's on the other side of the house. The well was about 500 feet to the east of the house, and ah, those pipes were laid, remember, that was almost solid rock.

INT: Oh my goodness.

CA: And, and ah, to dig through -.

INT: I'd thought it would have been mushy sand, but that's not the case.

CA: Oh, oh no, there's rock there, lots of rock. But, the pipes were laid in such fashion that they would, the water would freeze up, you know, in the wintertime, coming in, and then you didn't have water.

INT: What did you do? Melted snow, or did you -?

CA: Well, you, know, you hauled water.

INT: From the river?

CA: From the pump.

INT: Oh, now I noticed there was a pump way down in one of these pictures. There's a pump way down.

CA: Yeah, that has nothing to do with it.

INT: What's, now what is that?

CA: That was a pump, too, but at the time -

INT: Didn't help you much, huh?

CA: At the time I came there, there was no water there. No.

INT: Oh.

CA: No, there was no water there. No, it doesn't show the other side down through the woods here.

INT: I see.

CA: We had, once in a while, we had, in open winters, we had trouble.

INT: 'Cus there was no snow on top of the ground.

CA: Getting water there.

INT: Could you -.

CA: But there was no help for it. No help for it. The thing was that if we could keep the well full, then we had a supply on hand for quite a while.

INT: I see, I see.

CA: And then we had to be very careful about using the water, see. But, ah, but this [laughs] -.

INT: That's the chicken coop and then, that -.

CA: Chicken coop and the garage [laughs].

INT: They look like sturdy little buildings.

CA: No, they were pretty old when I came there. That's interesting.

INT: And all these buildings stayed on the grounds all the time you were there?

CA: That I was there.

INT: And you all kept them up.

CA: Yeah, yeah.

INT: Ok.

CA: No, I had nothing to do with the removal.

INT: Is that a little rabbit hutch there. Your boys kept rabbits, too?

CA: No, they didn't keep rabbits.

INT: It must have been another chicken or something.

CA: They were in the 4-H club. They kept the cnicken, yeah.

INT: And you had telephone and you had electricity in the house?

CA: Oh yes.

INT: Now, of course, you were living near town. A lot of your neighbors would have, too.

CA: Oh, sure, yeah, yeah.

INT: But in Gull Lake I suppose not everybody would have had those things.

CA: Well, we had a telephone at Gull Lake. And there was another thing. At, why, Gull Lake, it was part of job to keep that line open into Grand Rap-, or into Brainerd, 11 miles into Brainerd. The kids or somebody would shoot the insulators off, and they had to be replaced. So I had the spikes and the belt and the pliers and so forth, and once in a while, why, I'd have to climb a pole and put in new insulators.

INT: So you were a telephone lineman in addition to everything else.

CA: [Laughs] Yeah.

INT: Oh.

CA: Just about everything.

INT: I have talked to you much too long. I, you have such memories that I am just asking more and more, but I wondered if I've reminded you of things, or if there is something that you'd want to add that I haven't thought to ask you about.

CA: Well, ah, I don't think so, I think we've covered it pretty well.

INT: Ok.

CA: I, I hope you understand that I was not a, I did never have time to become the great hunter or fisherman. I admit that I had to take the officers fishing at Gull Lake.

INT: That was part of your job.

CA: Part of the job was to take them out and in other words, I figured it this way. Damtender, yes, hunter, no. I never had the time. Fisherman, well, I rowed the boat. The Colonel cast the hook and line. [Laughs]

INT: Now, Wes Walters talked to me about this a little bit, too, and I got the feeling that in some quarters the Headwaters was seen as easy duty, in the sense, that people were just having a good time -

CA: That's right.

INT: As sportsmen.

CA: Yeah.

INT: And there seem to have been a great difference among the damtenders how much sporting they actually did.

CA: That's right. Yeah.

INT: Were other damtenders -?

CA: Oh, yes, we had other damtenders that were greater sportsmen. I think, ah, the damtender that was at Winni, there, he, he was second lieutenant in the army. I think he enjoyed hunting particularly. And some of the others too, I know, that have gone up to Canada to hunt. They were hunters. But, ah, I never had time for it. My time off, was usually in the evenings, in the night, when I would take it off. And then, I had my choir to take care of; I was an officer in the church; I belonged to the Grand Rapids City Band, and ah, I liked to go with the Veterans of Foreign Wars once in a while. I'm still a, I'm a life member of the Veterans of Foreign Wars. But, ah, as far as getting away on vacations, those I always took with the family. We'd go back down to Kasson, to where my folks, my wife's parents had lived and her brother had the farm.

INT: Now where's Kasson?

CA: That's south, just south, near Rochester.

INT: I wondered if it was over in that part of the state.

CA: Yeah, not too far from Rochester.

INT: I thought I recognized the name. You mentioned the Izaak Walton League. That after you retired you were, were you active in the League?

CA: Oh, I was very active in the league. Even before -.

INT: When you were a damtender you were -.

CA: When I was a damtender, yeah.

INT: Ah, -.

CA: In other words, that was part of conservation there, at ah, at always, and I just seemed to get in with the fellows that were interested in that.

INT: Was there a difference, for instance, if you were doing, if you were involved in conservation, does that mean that you weren't as likely to hunt, was that, or did -.

CA: No, no.

INT: Those things didn't necessarily,-

CA: No, that didn't have anything to do with it.

INT: Yeah.

CA: Oh, no. The Izaak Walton Leaguers, they do a lot of hunting. They, they, but they're sticklers for regulations on hunting.

INT: I see, so its -.

CA: Yeah. That is the thing.

INT: The careful management of wildlife.

CA: Yeah.

INT: And was the Walton League involved in water level stuff? Did-?

CA: No, not necessarily.

INT: There was more wildlife habitat.

CA: Yeah. I really don't know why they selected me that year [1959-60], as president of the League. And ah, at the time, why, we always set up a goal, and our goal was to double desirable fish. In other words, what we tried to do, or I tried to do up there, and I had an article in the Grand Rapids Herald Review just about every week on my program. And what we were trying to do was to clear up certain streams that would flood in the spring and then leave the big fish up in areas, marshy areas where they would die. [Clock chimes in midst of this passage.]

INT: Mum hum.

CA: And we also wanted to, we memorialized the Corps of Engineers to try to govern the water levels so that these areas that would be flooded at, during the spring of the year, would be given a chance to slowly let the water back.

INT: Oh, so that the fish could swim --.

CA: To let the fish come back after they had spawned. And this was particularly true for the northern pike and, in some cases, the walleyes. So, and, and, we tried to do that.

INT: Mum hum. Was it successful. Did you, were you able to get the Corps to help you with that?

CA: Oh, yes, the Corps, they didn't want to see these big fish kills, either. But there were times when it was almost impossible for them to do that.

INT: Mum hum.

CA: Now this area of White Oak Lake would flood in the spring of the year and then draw down so that Deer River was left sometimes pretty dry. Well, the Deer River Club ah, would never join in with the Izaak Walton League in Grand Rapids on this; they had their own problems on ah, and they wanted an additional government dam at White Oak Lake. Which of course couldn't be done. But they worked for that for many years.

INT: Oh.

CA: It was never successful. But it's almost impossible for the Corps to govern, that is to, to really regulate that water under all conditions, so that it is satisfactory to everybody. But they did --. Ah, another thing we did after I had retired, they elected me as one of the directors of the Mississippi Headwaters Association. And then we went down here to the legislature and we memorialized the legislature to work with the Corps of Engineers to have hearings as to what damage might be done under certain conditions for the control of the water, and that the Corps of Engineers should let the people know in advance why or when they were to withdraw or to add on water. The operation would become more public. And I think that that has been done. Of course, I am not in touch with it now. I don't know.

INT: Yeah. Was your experience with the Corps kind of a help to you, or a hindrance in this kind of a thing?

CA: Oh, yes, it was a big help to me. A big help to me, and a big help to the Association.

INT: Mum hum

CA: Because, you see, I had, I had made copies of the water levels; one of the Corps of Engineers, district engineers said, you are a regular packrat. [Laughs]

INT: [Laughs]

CA: And some ways, I think I am. But, ah, [walks away and comes back]. Here are copies of the -.

INT: Oh my goodness. These are the water levels?

CA: Water levels.

INT: These are out of the old log books?

CA: And climate.

INT: Oh, my goodness.

CA: These have been, I've had these in court. I've been asked to present these in court in a court case. And they have been certified as accurate.

INT: So these are the log, these are copies from the old log books going back to 19-, 1884.

CA: 1884, yeah.

INT: From Pokegama.

CA: You'll find 1903 there, and you'll see on February -.

INT: Minus 59.

CA: 59 below zero is the actual temperature. Yeah. And this also has the amount of water discharged through the, through the dam month by month.

INT: I can see that.

CA: And ah, the precipitation, snow fall, the character of the day and so forth.

INT: My goodness.

CA: No, these were the basis for ah, ah lot of the information that I could give to the Association there.

INT: Amazing. Oh. [Examining book.]

CA: No, I'm never without something to do. [Laughs]

INT: [Laughs] Well, thank you very much for talking to me.

CA: Well, it's been a pleasure to go through this. I, I think we've covered the main things that I would write about. There may be some details here and there that ah -.

INT: Ok, well let's give ourselves a rest then.

U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS, ST. PAUL DISTRICT

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW FORM

Narrator Name: Warren D. Bridge

Address: P. O. Box 101, Federal Dam, Minnesota 56641

Date of Interview: December 16, 1987

Place of Interview: Bridge home, Federal Dam, Minnesota

Name of Interviewer: Jo Blatti

Project Title (if any): Headwaters Interviews, Series II

Narrator Biographical Information:

full name (including maiden name): Warren D. Bridge

Year of Birth: 1918

Spouse's full name: Virginia Behr Bridge

Subjects Discussed:

Mr. Bridge discusses his experiences as operator of a boat livery concession at Leech Lake dam 1936 - 1986. Matters discussed include: his Iowa family's search for fish guide business to operate in the 1930s; post World War II boom in vacation business; charges for launch services over the years; other concessionaires at Federal Dam; business arrangements with the Corps of Engineers and the town of Federal Dam; changes in the boat livery business over the years; people who guided for him.

TAPE RECORDING:

No. of Cassettes: 1 No. of Reels & Speed: _____

Length of Interview: 60 minutes

Release form signed (date): 12-16-87

Restrictions (if any): -0-

Comments:

- 1) Mr. Bridge has exceptionally precise enunciation. However, he does, very occasionally, conflate two words into one, possibly the result of a recent stroke.
- 2) Mrs. Bridge interjects comments in the second half of the interview.

TRANSCRIPT:

Date completed: February 1988 No. of Pages: 21

Restrictions (if any): -0-

Comments:

TAPE INDEX
Corps/Mississippi Headwaters Interviews, Series II
Interview with Warren Bridge by Jo Blatti
December 16, 1987
(1 hour)

Tape 1, side 1

- 0 min. Family fishing trips in Iowa and north central
 Minnesota in the 1920s and 1930s.
- Search for fish guide busines to buy, 1930s.
- 5 mins. Bridge's hay fever as a child, relief in Federal Dam
 area.
- Father's purchase of Clark's business at Federal Dam.
- Mr. Bridge's tutelage in guide business by Neuer
 brothers, who worked for his father.
- 10 mins. Logging in area, late 1930s, WWII years.
- Bridge's induction into Navy WWII.
- Postwar boom in business, initiation his own launch
 business with help of father.
- 15 mins. Describes standard boat launches, half-day arrangements
 and fees over time.
- Lists the other concessionaires at Leech when his family
 bought in in the 1930s.
- Notes that concessionaires leased from town of Federal
 Dam, not Corps when his family first came.
- 20 mins. Describes 'teetotally' campground operated by town of
 Federal Dam as he knew it in 1930s and 1940s.
- Describes sand roads in the area circa 1930s.
- Explains relocation of fish guide concessions at
 Leech Lake ca. 1948.
- Notes visits to St. Paul to "argue" with Corps staff
 there.
- 25 mins. Tells of floating boat morass at Leech Lake in WWII
 years.

Tape 1, side 2

0 min Identifies people who guided for him, special attention to area native Americans and Bridge's recruitment of Bemidji State students.

Gradual decrease in fishing, but not business following WWII.

Best times to fish seasonally.

5 mins. Muskie fishing beginning ca. 1955, damage these fish do to walleyes.

Questions Muskie policy DNR.

Notes more small boats on lake in addition to concession launches.

Effects of ice-fishing, civilization on fish populations.

11 mins. Identifies commercial fishing areas in Minnesota.

Discussion of limits on "home consumption" fishing, excesses of Soo Line excursions out of Chicago and Duluth in 1930s.

Changes in area railroad transport (passenger, freight, mail) over the years.

15 mins. Railroad personnel who used to live in Federal Dam, their descendants now.

Enumerates businesses and social organizations in town ca. 1930s.

20 mins. Contemporary need to shop in surrounding communities, distances involved.

Effects of Corps campground on local business described as marginal.

Notes importance of private ownership small boats and RVs in changing resort business.

25 mins. Describes leasing arrangements with Federal Dam and Corps over the years.

Financial advantages of Corps leases.

NOTE: In conversation directly following the interview, Mr. Bridge attributed contention among Leech Lake concession operators to competition for business in the last 15-20

years. He contrasted that with a mid-season "wild fling", in the "slack" time sometime between the July 4th and Labor Day holidays; all the Leech Lake operators would go fishing together for one day. Mr. Bridge located this custom "before the war."

Also, when contacted by phone in January 1988, concerning names, spellings and the like, Mr. Bridge took the opportunity to question Corps competition with private operators in the development of recreation facilities - Mr. Bridge more or less declined to engage this question on tape, though his wife's interjections on this subject are clearly negative.

U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS, ST. PAUL DISTRICT

ORAL HISTORY AGREEMENT FORM

I, Warren Bridge, a participant in
an oral history interview recorded on December 16, 1987,
hereby give and deliver to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, St. Paul
District all the incidents of ownership in that interview, including
copyright, from this time forward.

Signed:

Date December 16, 1987

Warren Bridge
Donor

PO Box 101
Address

Federal Dam 56641

Signed:

Jo Ratti
Interviewer

Interview with Warren Bridge by Jo Blatti
December 16, 1987
Corps/Mississippi Headwaters Project

Int. This is Jo Blatti interviewing Warren Bridge at his home in Federal Dam on Wednesday, December 16th, 1987. This is for the Corps of Engineers interview series on recreational development in the Headwaters area. The Mississippi Reservoir System.

Could I ask you Mr. Bridge when your family began to operate the boat - .

Bridge 1936.

Int. And, how did you get into it? Are you from this part of the country or -

Bridge No, I was originally from the central part of Iowa, and my father was a great hand to go fishing on Sunday. And I was brought up that way, so on Sundays lots of times I would walk three miles to the river, three miles back, accompanied with my mother and fish all day on Sundays. And, lots of times on Sundays, my father would take the whole family on an outing, picnic and fishing excursion. We would go to various places throughout central part of Iowa. And in 1930, he came to Dodge Center to visit some of our relatives, and in 1931 he came up to Federal Dam here and it was such wonderful fishing for - the excursion on the lake consisted of at that time. And 1932 was a bad year, we could none of us afford to go fishing anywhere, so we didn't try to fish any throughout 1932.

Int. Now, was your family in business or farming?

Bridge My family was farming. My dad farmed in Benton County in Denton, Iowa. I think it was 1916 til 1936 when we moved up here. In 1933, we came up. We stayed at Horseshoe Lake at Pine River, and in 1934 we came to Bena and stayed at Portage Lake, Iowana Beach. 1935 we stayed at Deer Lake, Deer River and different resorts different places. We ventured a days drive from the resort in various areas. Even at one time we went as far as International Falls and went across the line into Canada. That was in 1935.

Int. Now, was your dad kind of scouting, was he trying to figure out if he wanted to -

Bridge He was interested in travelling and fishing at the same time. And so we got quite a cross section of the whole

doggone country. It appeared that anywhere from Bemdijsi to Grand Rapids seemed to be the central part of the location that we desired, which we had no recollection of buying anything, but at that time we were just scouting. And in 1936, 1935 we found a resort for sale on Steamboat Bay, Steamboat Lake and -

Int. Now, that is on Leech?

Bridge And we tried in 1935 to buy that, because my father wanted to kind of scout around and see if he could find something, you know. I had a terrible case of hay fever when I was a child, and I'd get up here with about a dozen handkerchiefs and I'd wet them all in one day from hay fever. I'd stay overnight and get up the next morning and never knew I ever had it. And I got wonderful relief up here. So, we had that kind of in the back of our mind. And in 1936, we came up here in June or July, made a fishing trip, and we found that we could buy a resort for a certain amount of money, one of the resorts here at Federal Dam. And so, my father, he dealt with both the resort on Steamboat Lake and the resort here at Federal Dam. And between the two, decided on the one here at Federal Dam. So he approached the people, decided they would make a sale. That's the reason for my being in this community.

Int. Do you remember how much your father paid for that? Did you ever know?

Bridge Oh, yes, somewhere in the line of \$6,000. At that time -

Int. Do you remember who he bought it from?

Bridge People by the name of Clark.

Int. OK

Bridge They were old-time people around here. They had been here for many years, and they developed some of the launch fishing trips that derived as resorts throughout the 1920s, after the First World War.

Int. Now, how old were you when your family moved up here?

Bridge When I moved up here, I was 18 years old.

Int. So you were old enough to really pay attention to what was going on. Did you begin to work in the business immediately?

Bridge Right away.

Int. How did you learn to be a fish guide?

Bridge Two brothers that worked for my father, they worked for Mr. Clark preceding us, and through their efforts and my volunteering, why, there was a - I can't remember now what you would say, but it was an effort made for learning the trade, you might say.

Int. Would you go out? Would they show you stuff? I mean would you kind of go out -

Bridge We went out on the lake fishing every day, and through their efforts and my father's urging, I went along with and learned what to do and when to do it and not to do it and so on.

Int. Do you remember any tips or things that they told you that were important?

Bridge Not really, not really. It just come kind of naturally. Just didn't have no effort at all to improve myself in anyway shape or form.

Int. Now, who were these brothers?

Bridge Neuer brothers. They were here working for Mr. Clark when we came here, and they worked the following two years for my father. Then the Second World War came along, and the effort was directed towards logging by them. They were working in the woods in the winter-time, and there was a big demand for the logging industry at that time. And of course, they stuck with that because it helped them evade the draft, and it also helped the war effort at the same time.

Int. It was like being in agricultural worker, some people stayed -

Bridge Well, you might say it was agriculture, because it was forestry. And through their efforts in the wintertime, I learned quite a bit of the forestry business.

Int. Now did you -

Bridge In fact, I had a logging camp of my own.

Int. Oh, did you? Would this have been in the '40s, too?

Bridge Was I what?

Int. Was this in the '40s?

Bridge 1930s. Late '30s. And 1941, I was called into the service and at that time you had your option as to what

branch of the service you went into, and I went into the Navy. I passed, out of 37 people who took the test, I was 1 of 7 that passed. So, I got a pretty good health record by having the ability to pass a Navy test at that time, because it was very, very strict.

Int. And so, of course, you had spent alot of time around boats, too, by that point in your life.

Bridge My boating background along with what the Navy had to offer jibed. They worked together, and I learned more and more from the Navy in different branches of carpentry. That's what I specialized in, and I learned the nomenclature of boats. I learned pattern making. I learned, oh, a lot of the cabinet work the Navy performed at that time. So, I had a pretty good background in learning the trade there. I spent 3 1/2 years overseas, and I was home every summer except one.

Int. Oh, really.

Bridge I run the boats.

Int. Wasn't that kind of unusual?

Bridge Yes, it was.

Int. How did that come about? Was there anything -

Bridge I spent 23 months in Dutch Harbor, Alaska, and I made one trip back during that course of that time. And when I came back, I always got on the boats and went fishing, cause that was natural for me. I spent 3 1/2 years overseas, came back and in the course of the interim, there was a big trade developed in the business. Because after the war everybody kind of, oh, they kind of exploded, you might say. They went to the extremes of taking vacations. Fishing especially, which seemed to be in line with the business at hand.

Int. Oh, you mean it would be, kind of like companies would bring people up, and things like that?

Bridge Yes. And after the war I developed from one boat which I owned. My dad purchased one of the resort landings down there in 1938 for me, and I worked for two years after that paying him back. And I got the place paid for. And I wound up with one launch in operation, and one not in operation. They were not too good a boats. They were pretty old. I started out with that one old boat in 1942, and it grew into four boats by 1949 or somewhere about in there.

Int. Now, how big where those boats? How many people?

Bridge 32 feet long.

Int. How many people would fish in a boat that size?

Bridge Oh, they were licensed to carry so many people per square foot, and average run around six to ten, depending on the size of the boat.

Int. I see. Now, how many people - about what would a person pay after the war, for a place on a fish boat?

Bridge Must have been about \$2.50 per trip, if I remember right.

Int. Would that be half a day?

Bridge For half a day. That included the, all the - . The only thing you needed was your tackle and warm clothes.

Int. So, if there was any food or anything, you all provided that?

Bridge No, no food. Just the trip.

Int. Bait and your expertise.

Bridge (Laughs) At that time, there were plenty of fish, and we didn't have any trouble getting people fish most of the time.

Int. Now, was that price after the war any higher than what people would have paid in the late '30s?

Bridge When we originally came here, it was \$1.50.

Int. For half a day.

Bridge Yes, and now it's grown until it's got to be \$16 for half a day for a trip, and some charge more and some charge \$16, but that seems to be the going average price.

Int. Now, in the more recent years that I have been looking at, the records for the Federal Dam campground and Recreation Area, there seems to have been about 5 concessions all the time. Was that true when you came up here in the '30s?

Bridge There was 4 concessions when we moved up here.

Int. Uh huh. Who were they, besides the Clark -

Bridge Mr. [Louis] Hiller and Mr. [Frank] Condon and my father

and Mr. [William] Worcester. At that time, we all operated independently. There was plenty of business for all. It wasn't the rushing trade like there is today, not so fast an operation, but there was enough to survive. And we got along real good.

Int. Did you kind of talk to people, I mean, did you all visit back and forth, those of you who ran the concessions?

Bridge Did we what?

Int. Did you visit and just talk to each other about how business was?

Bridge Oh, sure, we all got along. We all got the same price, and very seldom was there any difference in the price. And then it would only be temporary, but the agreement between the Corps of Engineers and the concessionaires was that each individual maintain a proper level of charge, which we all decided that was the best for all of us concerned.

Int. So you would all talk among yourselves and you would give the Corps -

Bridge Yes, we always had a meeting just before fishing season, usually around the first of May and decided what the price would be for the following summer.

Int. I see. Now did you all sign your leases with the Corps together?

Bridge At first, it was subleased from the village of Federal Dam and the village held the contract.

Int. Oh, for Federal Dam. Now when did that change? If you can remember.

Bridge Approximately 1940.

Int. So, right before the war.

Bridge Could be a year or two either way. But, uh.

Int. Now, I understand that Federal Dam used to operate a campground of its own.

Bridge Yes.

Int. Was that in operation when you came up here?

Bridge Yes. My father stayed in that campground.

Int. Oh, really.

Bridge It's right where this road is now.

Int. The one that I just drove in to your house?

Bridge Where this new highway goes through. It was between here and that blue sign down there.

Int. Ok, so it is right on the other [meaning north] side of the dam. [Note: Road under discussion is south of the dam, interviewer misinterpreted Bridge.]

Bridge The dam is to the northwest from there.

Int. Ok, so right where K.C.'s Restaurant is, am I placing it right?

Bridge It would take, what?

Int. Right where the K.C Restaurant is?

Bridge Well, no it was -

Int. Down closer to the dam?

Bridge About half way between, about a third of the way between K.C.'s Restaurant and the dam.

Int. Ok. Now I understand that there was a pump and a dining hall for people in that [campground]?

Bridge No, there was nothing in there. It was a teetotally [temperance], camping area, and there was a three-sided building with tables and benches inside in case it rained. So that you could cook whatever you wanted to, inside out of the rain. Outside of that, there wasn't anything, toilets. That's about all.

Int. Ok, so it did have toilets, and it did have a pump, is that right?

Bridge Yes, it had a pump there.

Int. Now, do you remember when that campground went out?

Bridge Let's see. Well, it stopped with the construction of cabins in the town of Federal Dam, and that was preceding World War II -

Int. That people began to build cabins.

Bridge Late '30s, it [the town campground] kind of receded a little bit, and by the end of the second World War,

it was pretty well abolished.

Int. I see. Now did people, for instance, now when your family came up here from Iowa, did you drive or did you take the railroad?

Bridge No, we drove. There were sand roads. Mostly sand roads at that time.

Int. It must have been kind of hard traveling?

Bridge Yes, it was. It was usually two ruts, and you got out of the rut to let one or the others pass by. Gave them half the road, and when you got past one another, you looked back to make sure that everybody got back into the rut again. It was all sand road down there around the concessions at that time.

Int. Now, I understand back in the days when your family bought the concession, that the offices for each concession were right on the shore; they aren't back where they are now.

Bridge They were all distributed between the road, which was a little sand road, and the water, which kind of, you might say, hugged river. Most all of the buildings.

Int. Now, do you remember when the offices were put back on the other side of the road and -

Bridge Yeah. Let's see, 19 and 48, I think it was.

Int. When that change was made, it was after the war.

Bridge All the buildings were moved back across the road.

Int. And, I understand that you put in privies and everything - is that when that happened?

Bridge Well, the ones along the river were frowned on by the State Health Department. And the Corps of Engineers, they were lax in giving us any more leeway to construct something away from the water, so the State Health Department would approve it. And when the two got their heads together, we eventually wound up with a 100' concession.

Int. So what happened is that you got deeper lots?

Bridge That's the left hand side of the road when you are going down to the concessions, and that is where it is today.

Int. Do you remember who was involved in that? Did people

like Jim von Lorenz, is that somebody you remember?

Bridge I am trying to think of the Colonel's name in St. Paul that we dealt with. He came up to our place year before last in summertime. We sat and visited. And we argued and argued when he was in the office in St. Paul, we argued and argued together.

Int. Oh, you went down to St. Paul to see him?

Bridge Oh, many times.

Int. I see. It was a big trip to make wasn't it, or was it?

Bridge Yes, it was.

Int. So the concessionaires would go down -

Bridge Used to leave here at 3, 4 o'clock in the morning and get back here at 9 to 12 o'clock at night.

Int. So, all of you would go together in a car and you would do your business with - now, would it have been Colonel Walters, Wesley Walters?

Bridge Yes, that's right. Wes Walters. He visited me a year before last in the summertime.

Int. Oh, he just came up here on a trip, you mean?

Bridge He came up to see the Corps of Engineers layout as it is today.

Int. Oh ho, what did he think?

Bridge It was a far cry from what he was used to.

Int. I talked with him a week or so ago about some of this, and part of it is trying to get the same story from different people.

Bridge Oh, I see, so if they coincide.

Int. Which they do in many respects.

Bridge Wes Walters. He was here many times and we talked with him and argued and cussed and discussed.

Int. Now, why would you cuss him - what was was -

Bridge During the dry years, the bogs all grew in the water. All along the water and the lakefront and the waterfront and so on. After the war, the water was raised way up, quite high. Those bogs blew loose in storms, and lots

of times they would cover the whole entire waterfront, and that's when we cussed.

Int. Oh, because you couldn't get your boats out and you couldn't -

Bridge We couldn't get in and out. And there was a trip or two made by the engineers to figure out how to get rid of the bogs. And, nobody could come up with any bright ideas. So, we took our launches as long as they floated. We took our launches all grouped together and pushed and pushed and pushed against the bogs and pushed them out of our area. To push more to the dam, which is what the Corps wanted. Then they, in turn, rigged up saws and made strips about 5 feet wide and run them through the dam and broke them all to pieces.

Int. Oh, my goodness.

Bridge And, they spent one whole entire summer doing that, and, I think, probably more than that.

Int. How did that affect your business?

Bridge At the time, it made us out of business for about 3 or 4 days a week. And when we decided that they could be pushed, and we all got together and pushed, why, it wound up as a minor instead of a major catastrophe

Int. So, this was something that happened after the war, this big floating bog business.

Bridge Yes, it happened after the war.

Int. In the high water that happened in those years. Were there other kinds of problems, I mean, this sounds like a special -

Bridge No, the Corps took anchors after we pushed the bogs over towards the dam. They took anchors and put out onto the bog and anchored it down so that it would stay in one position and wouldn't float away in the storms somewhere. And after it was anchored, why then, they got ice saws and put 'em on the end of a pole and they sawed this bog right in two, in five foot widths.

Int. That is really amazing. This sounds like kind of a special thing.

Bridge It don't usually happen, but at that time, throughout all of the upper Mississippi headwaters area, there were occasions that it might happen from various bogs. We had a bay out here in the southeast corner

of the lake, and that grew up into a huge, big bog. And the Second World War was over, the water come up, and they blew all over the lake. Some places they would be on the west side of the lake, some places they would be on the east side. And you never knew where they were going to be from storms that blew around. And they eventually broke up from the ice and lodging in the mouth of the river, which we had to trespass through a couple times. And we eventually wound up getting rid of them that way. There are still signs of them if you know where to look, there are still signs of them, in the lake, now.

Tape One Side Two

Int. Were there other kinds of special problems or kind of natural disasters of that sort that are as memorable, when you think about it?

Bridge Not really.

Int. That was really a very special -

Bridge Yes, it was.

Int. Now, I wondered who worked for you when you were running your service with the four boats, who helped you?

Bridge Jim Cloud, Ed Parrisee up from Bemidji Teachers College.

Int. You had teachers or students or - ?

Bridge Students. They were let off in the summertime because there was no school and -

Int. Now, did you have friends over there, or how did you make that connection?

Bridge I'm trying to think of the name of that department. Financial Aid Department was who I went to, and then I found out from there that there was employment to be had at Duluth and here at Bemidji.

Int. Well, isn't that interesting. Do other people do that?

Bridge No, nobody else did that.

Int. So, you had college students.

Bridge I'd run the ads in the local papers, that helped, sometimes. I had everybody from - well, you might say outlaws to inlaws. [Laughs]

Int. That's funny. How did you decide whether to take a college student or not? Were these kids who had grown up in this area?

Bridge Well, we had to teach them. And after we got one year's teaching past, why they were well enough off that they could decide for themselves whether they wanted to work the succeeding year or not. Some of them worked three or four years for me. I have had pastors, bible students, butchers, every occupation you can think of to work for me.

Int. That is interesting.

Bridge Teachers, all kinds of people.

Int. Generally, did it work out pretty well? I mean, I would guess there might be -

Bridge Some did, some didn't. You find that with any occupation.

Int. I would think with fish guiding, it might be a little bit of a problem if you have a boatload of people and -

Bridge Well, you usually stuck pretty close together out in the lake, and by doing so, the good fishing we had in those years, why, it wasn't too hard to train somebody.

Int. Now, did the fishing get poorer as years went on?

Bridge Yes, it did.

Int. Now, do you remember when you thought it was beginning to get a little thin.

Bridge Following the second World War, you could see a gradual decrease in the amount of fish we brought in.

Int. Were there some areas that really seemed poorer, or was it just a general - ?

Bridge No, just general. Just general. But uh -

Int. Did business get more difficult, or -

Bridge No, there was a boom in business. There was a big boom in business. Everybody was short-changed for vacations during the second World War, and by that reason, why, they all decided that they was going to have a vacation or bust. And, that's what they did.

Int. I suppose more people began - is it your observation that more people began to have vacations?

Bridge We had approximately, I'd say, somewhere between five and ten persons more than what we did preceding the war.

Int. Per day you mean? Do you remember figures, for like how many people, in the '30s?

Bridge No. I don't remember. I don't know as very much track of that was kept. It might have been somebody kept track of it privately, but we didn't go at it.

Int. You just filled your boats.

Bridge My wife is good at that; she is a bookkeeper.

Int. When you are saying that fishing, you know, you began to notice after the war that the fishing wasn't quite as good -

Bridge That's right.

Int. Did you think it would -

Bridge Especially about five years after the war started to end, approximately 1950, you started to see a decline in the fishing.

Int. Now, what did that mean for your business?

Bridge Well, people are still trying, whether they catch anything or not. Sometimes they are lucky enough to catch quite a few. Sometimes they are not quite so lucky. But, different parts of the summer are better. Especially the first part of the summer is better than the latter half of the summer. And in September or early October, we have days that are especially good.

Int. Now, why do you think that is?

Bridge Ever since the time of Christ they've been trying to figure out fishing. There's no answer to that.

Int. It just is. I wanted to ask if you thought that the decline in fishing was because of human beings fishing or -

Bridge Yes, to a certain extent and then we developed the muskie fishing and in 1955 -

Int. Now, how was that different from -

Bridge Well, I'll lead up to that. 1955 we caught a terrible lot of muskies, and of course, it was the first time we ever caught muskies. But -

Int. They were just moving in?

Bridge There were growth rings on the scales, and those growth rings I took off of fish and took them to the biologist in Grand Rapids at the State Bureau of Fisheries and we counted the rings. And there were approximately 11 years in developing. And in the course of one to two years before we caught all those muskies, we could hardly catch a walleye without having some injury on the fish. Probably the muskies bit into them, chewed on them and spit them out. For that reason, I wonder whether it is a good policy or not to develop muskie fishing which the DNR has recommended highly now. Especially in different lakes they are trying to classify as muskie lakes. Cass Lake right now happens to be one of them.

Int. So, they are kind of vicious fish, is what you are saying.

Bridge They are fish that kills. They are destructive; they don't necessarily eat the fish, but they are just destructive.

Int. I see. They just take a mouthful.

Bridge They bite the fish and chew the fish. Lots of times, I've caught walleyes, that you can just take your fingers and put in the holes, right in the side of the fish. Just huge, big gashes in the fish, and they [muskies] have an effect on the fish we catch.

Also, through the years, more small boats have been developed that carried more fishermen out on the lake. Therefore, it depletes the fish supply in a hurry.

Int. So, there are more small boats in addition to the bigger launches out there?

Bridge Yes. There always will be small boats, and there will always be people that want to fish on the big boats. They don't care what the weather is like; they don't want to be caught out there in a storm, and it gets terrible waves out there sometimes.

Int. It's a very big lake. Now, you were mentioning that people got along real well along the concessions when you all came up here. As fishing got worse, did every-

body continue to get along?

Bridge I don't think that had any effect on the amount of compatibility amongst the people down there. We don't see the amount of fish being taken now that used to be taken, but I'd like to think that the people don't have anything to do with the fish. Whether there are fewer fish, more fish or the development of the muskie depletes all the supply all the way around. Winter fishing is hard on fish and uh -

Int. Is there more ice fishing than there used to be when you were young up here?

Bridge Yes. Yes, there is. Right now, I think there is starting to be a decline in it, just a little bit, not very much. But, I think the inroads of civilization are taking their toll on all fishing throughout Minnesota. Our laws are trying to coincide with what amount of fish we have, and they're encouraging people to take more fish where there is more fishermen to take them. I don't think the fish would stand a chance if they were turned loose on them, you might say. But, if they would shut the thing down, so the fish would stand a chance. I think we would all be better off.

Int. What happens, say, when somebody goes and gets a boatload of fish, and they are not going to take everything home to a freezer or the days before freezers, what happened to all that fish?

Bridge They are liable.

Int. What does that mean?

Bridge Well, they're violating the law.

Int. Oh, you are never supposed to catch more than you - .

Bridge No, they have limits on a fish and by increasing or decreasing those amount of limits, mostly decreasing, because we got fewer fish than we used to.

Int. I wondered if you're, like if the fish guides sold walleye to restaurants or something, or if that -

Bridge No, no. Red Lake in the State of Minnesota, Red Lake and down on the Mississippi below Minneapolis, there's commercial fishing in both places, and along in the Lake Superior, but -

Int. All of this fish is for home consumption.

Bridge All for individual consumption. Now, many, many years ago, this is what happens when laws are not followed explicitly. And people used to go out on the lake fishing in the morning. They come in with maybe the limit of fish. That was before we had any cabins in this town to speak of. People used to come up to the park, cook what fish they wanted to eat. The rest they would throw in the garbage. The man who took care of cleaning the municipal campground, you might say, lived where RC's [K.C.'s] place is now. There was a house there, and he used to have a wheelbarrow. And he would wheel those fish off into the woods, right here in the woods, and bury them.

And also, another thing that happened, and people were, they didn't pay any attention to laws. They used to run trains out of Chicago on the Soo Line, fishing excursions, same as skiing excursions or something like that, into Federal Dam here. And they used to have an ice house right here, where they used to unload the coal or half the coal off the tender of the steam engines at that time. Throw the fish in there, the people went fishing on the lake, excursions on the lake, and they would throw the fish in there and all. They were were drawn, gilled and gutted, and they would throw ice up on top of them and go back to Chicago. Hauled trainloads and trainloads and trainloads of them. Just out of the tender alone.

Int. Now is this in your time, when you were up here or was this what people - ?

Bridge Yes. When we first came up here. That was the Soo Line division point here at Federal Dam.

Int. I have seen some of the brochures for earlier fishing excursions in the '20s and even in the World War I years, and I wonder if that was something your family remembered.

Bridge Yeah, that was part of it.

Int. Do you remember when the railroad went out? And, did that effect how things were?

Bridge Virginia, when did the railroad go out of Federal Dam?

Mrs. B. [indecipherable] it wasn't very long ago.

Int. When did passenger service stop though?

Mrs. B. Oh, that's a joke. They had an engine and a caboose,

I guess, is what they had on the train. Except if it was freight, then it was different.

Bridge Oh, they had passenger trains, too. They used to come meet here at Federal Dam. I think it has been about 15 years ago.

Mrs. B Oh, yeah, longer than that I guess, I don't remember when.

Bridge Somewhere between 15 and 20 years ago, they decided that it wasn't a paying proposition to operate the trains anymore. The passenger trains. So, they ceased operation, and that's has been somewhere between 15 and 20 years ago.

Mrs. B Oh, longer than that, because the mail used to come that way. It has been longer than that.

Bridge Yeah, it's probably been more than 20 years.

Int. I have heard about the mail trains, long ago in other -

Bridge We used to have engineers, one of them lived right across the street. One lived two blocks this way, and there used to be a mailman that took the mail off the train and trucked it up to the post office.

Mrs. B On a two wheeled cart. A big, two wheeled cart. Twice a day the mail came.

Int. I just want to ask a couple of more questions. I don't want to interrupt your lunch, or, you know, but did, was the roundhouse still operating when your family moved up?

Bridge Yes. Many years afterwards that we moved up here.

Int. Would it be in the war years that -

Bridge Oh, yes. Let's see, it's been about 15 years since, somewhere between 15 and 20 years.

Int. So, all of that kind of went out around the same time.

Bridge Yes, it has all sort of gone by.

Int. And the railroad people moved out of town to other places?

Mrs. B. Oh, no.

Bridge Some of them are still living here.

Int. Retired?

Mrs. B. They used to live here because it was cheaper to live here than in Duluth. So this is where their homes were. This is where their main homes were.

Bridge Most of them are descendants from them. They still live in the community. We have one lady that lives right across the street in the same block, and her father was an engineer. And this man that lived right here, he was a brakeman, and we had an Indian that lived about 8 miles out in the country, and he was a brakeman for the railroad.

Int. Did you, because of your business or just living here in town, did you get to know Indians in the community?

Bridge Oh, lots of Indians.

Mrs. B. Oh they'd go to school with them.

Bridge I still have Indians working for me.

Int. So, that was just part of life, it was not -

Bridge Just took it for granted.

Mrs. B. They weren't any different than anybody else. They went to the same schools; they went to the same places, shopped the same stores.

Int. In your time, has Federal Dam changed very much as a community?

Bridge Oh, when we first came here, they had Odd Fellows Hall, they had a restaurant, a hardware store. There used to be a bank, used to be a hotel here - a big hotel. There was a three-story school house, a butcher shop, two filling stations. My gosh, I can't remember all the stuff right now.

Mrs. B. That was 50 years ago.

Int. Well, it was 50 years ago when your family came here though, wasn't it? So, now you would go to Bena or Grand Rapids or Deer River?

Bridge Grand Rapids to shop most of the time. Bemidji, Grand Rapids. We do some shopping in Deer River, Cass Lake and Longville which are equidistant. And same way with Remer. Remer is probably a little bit further. 27 miles to Deer River, 27 to Cass Lake, 27 to Remer and about 18,19 to Longville. So we shop most of the time in Grand Rapids.

Int. When the Corps started developing the campground at the Dam, did that make much difference in your business or in the town itself?

Bridge No, I couldn't say it made a whole lot of difference. It's developed the area for small boats more than it has helped the launch services.

Int. So, it would be more for people that bring their own boats or day people?

Bridge Yeah, that was the idea.

Mrs. B The business people up town and the people in town said that it didn't do them one bit of good. They bring their groceries, bring everything, except they would buy gas maybe. But it didn't do them any good.

Bridge Now there's a lot of RV's. And they camp in the campground here considerably, in competition with the cabin area business.

Int. Over the years that you operated the business, would you say that business has always held steady or increased or decreased?

Bridge Oh, it stayed pretty close to the same all the time. There may be some variations of it, but it may be due to the operators' business, aspects, too. But I can't see there is a great lot of difference. There has been some additional business derived from the campground here from the Corps of Engineers, and we have lost a considerable lot of business, too. So, it averages pretty much the same.

Int. So, you would say more people doing different things? Is that a fair way?

Bridge Yeah, as time goes by, boats are made to withstand higher waves and faster motors and things like that, which develops the business in its own aspect regardless whether it is the launch business or here or there - where it is at. It could be all over. And nowadays you see cars [on Route 2] which is 8 miles north of us. Up and down this road, there is thousands and thousands of boats behind, towed behind vehicles which didn't happen only through development of the resort industry. The resort men are having a hard time now throughout the industry to make a living. Some of them are closing up; some are subdividing, selling off their property, and some are sticking by it. Those that stick by it are doing pretty good. They

kind of swing with the trend of the trade, which is a good thing. Really a good thing.

Int. Can you remember what your early lease arrangements were with the Corps?

Bridge Early arrangements? Our earliest arrangements were with the village.

Int. Oh, that's right. I'm sorry, you told me that.

Bridge But after we got direct leases from the Corps of Engineers, then we started to realize that we could move back from our initial ground granted to us by the Corps, which helped.

Int. How much did it cost to lease the land when you first - ?

Bridge When we first moved back?

Int. Well, no, before you moved back, when you were still dealing with Federal Dam -

Bridge Oh, gosh -

Int. Can you remember?

Bridge I think the first years was \$50.

Int. A year?

Bridge Yes.

Int. And then how did it go up when the years went on?

Bridge Oh, every so often there was an additional increase in the fare, especially after we moved back across the road.

Int. That was more expensive?

Bridge That's when the additional increase of rates. The Corps now, through arrangements with the concessionaires decided that we needed sewage and water, so the Corps has piped additional piping to accomodate that.

Int. Now, do you remember what the lease was when that happened?

Mrs. B It's been about three years now since they've had water.

Bridge I think about \$500 now - I think it was \$250, wasn't it? Yeah, I think about \$250 at that time. That's only been the last -

Int. Few years.

Int. Did leasing from the Corps give you and other concessionaires an advantage over people who didn't, in any way? I mean, was it cheaper to work with the Corps of Engineers than it was to own your own?

Bridge Yes, by far.

Int. What made it cheaper?

Bridge Well, the Corps didn't have any recreational facilities to offer the public. Now, they have rearranged some lots down there, so the concessionaires are being squeezed off to one side, and the Corps of Engineers is developing a public landing for one thing. Marina for another thing, and they have 70-some sites in here for R.V.s now, and that's catering in the resort business towards what the public demands and which the private individual is obsolescence too. [in opposition to?]

Mrs. B Now the reason that we moved across the road is because we couldn't have outhouses draining into their - so they had to give us 100 square feet which they did. And I think the reason that they put in the water and sewer was probably eventually for the same reason.

Int. Right, right.

U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS, ST. PAUL DISTRICT

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW FORM

Narrator Name: Merton (Mert) Lego

Address: P.O. Federal Dam, MN 56641

Date of Interview: 12-15-87

Place of Interview: Leech Lake Tribal Center, Cass Lake

Name of Interviewer: Jo Blatti

Project Title (if any): Headwaters Interviews, Series II

Narrator Biographical Information:

Full name (including maiden name): Merton (Mert) Lego

Year of Birth: 6.24.32

Spouse's full name: Ardene Forboard Lego

Subjects Discussed:

Youth and adulthood in Federal Dam area ca WWII to the present. Family history in the area - Chicago RR family and Wisconsin Chippewa/Fr. Canadian moved west. Damtenders he remembers. Father's businesses in town, including wild rice. Current operations with brother, another partner and Leech Lake Reservation in wild rice, timbering and general contracting. Family's occupancy of Leech Lake dwelling during WWII. Concern for wildlife habitat. Changes in concessions at Federal Dam over years. Concern over Corps and Forest Service policies - Mickey Mouse regulations, uneven record of respect for treaty obligations; informant's belief that metropolitan reservoir function of Headwaters installation works to disadvantage of those in immediate area.

TAPE RECORDING:

No. of Cassettes: 2 No. of Reels & Speed: _____

Length of Interview: 1 hour, 22 minutes

Release form signed (date): 12-15-88

Restrictions (if any): -0-

Comments: Informant moves away from the microphone some. Machine flips off on occasion, no loss of material, however.

TRANSCRIPT:

Date completed: February 1988 No. of Pages: 45

Restrictions (if any): -0-

Comments:

TAPE INDEX
Corps/Mississippi Headwaters Interviews, Series II
Interview with Mert Lego
December 15, 1987
(1 hour & 20 minutes)

Tape 1, Side 1

- 0 min. Family history in Federal Dam. Mother's family came in with the railroad in 1910; father came in 1914 at age 14, stayed with uncle Gus Fairbanks, Indian people
- 5 mins. Hans Olson 1st damtender can remember; we lived on dam - swam, fished, went over falls in wash dishes
- Hauled timber across dam in 1948, '49 (tie-cuts)
- 10 mins. Enumerates damtenders: Hans Olson; Carl Anderson; Henry Dart; a Daniels (?); Ole Henderson
- Lego & brother bought officers quarters ca. the 1970s & resold to a lumber dealer who is using building as cabin nr. Longville
- 15 mins. Describes Corps house, barns and grounds at Federal Dam during his family's occupancy ca. WWII
- Removal of Corps outbuildings to various sites in Federal Dam
- Examines 1962 map of Federal Dam facility, esp. dwelling, garden and concession arrangements
- 20 mins. Locates Corps boathouse, immediately in front of house and Moscrip/Heller boathouses beyond quarters area
- Identifies concession operators ca. WWII -- Louie Heller, Frank Condon, Bridges, Clark
- Continues discussion of concession operations and changes -- Neuer boys and old Bill Worcester, Russell Lego, Sr.'s brief lease ca 1943 (bought from Heller)
- 26 mins. Concession changes continued - Condon sold to Sims, Sawyer, Lego boys bought building and used for resort cabin

Tape 1, Side 2

- 0 mins. Worcester and Neuer boys identified as "old-time" Federal Dam; Condon from Kansas originally, Bridges from Iowa
- Identifies native American fish guides at Federal Dam, notes that Whipholt, Walker, have greater Indian guide presence than Federal Dam

Quieter business during WWII, defense plants, logging etc.

War ace Joe Foss fishing on leave

5 mins. How Lego family came to lease dwelling during WWII, father's interest in buying the place

Family built new house uptown ca. 1949

Corps site as special place

10 mins. Hunting better in his youth, blames Corps for killing river, everyone for killing too much game

Story of mink struggling to relocate young in high water

Wild rice business with brother ca. 1967-68

Identifies other important rice planters - Kasbos, Anderson, Algot Johnson

Lego family business buying rice off the lakes

Father's store, land development activities and liquor store. Story of prohibition against part-Indian father entering the liquor store, business in wife's name.

15 mins. Describes family rice business, 20% state crop ca 1967-68, effects of university experiments with paddy rice

Reservation paddies and timbering

Rice finishing techniques/light-dark/importance of machinery, process to result

20 mins. Seelye, supt.'s diary from Winni; remembers Ed Rawley, who came to Federal Dam from White Earth Reservation

25 mins. Family history of Legos, originally French Canadian and Wisconsin Chippewa nr. St. Croix Falls

Grandfather came out to White Earth to get land claim, something went wrong

Tape 2, Side 1

0 min. Father's association with Headwaters projects in early 1960s, specifically plan to stabilize water levels in Federal Dam area toward wildlife habitat, #2 priority behind Day's High Landing at the time

Project still talked of in area, though maps, etc. no longer around

6 mins. Suggests bitterness Indian/Corps - graves washed into the lake

Campground Federal Dam, should be elsewhere. Lego had farm for sale on lake that would've been perfect

Corps built nice campground, but it doesn't do the town any good

Mickey-Mouse regulations

Forest Service destroying forest, hard to fight

11 mins. Dredging taking banks along river, too shallow and plugged badly

Reiterates belief that campground should've been built out of town

Possibility for accidents

Compares fishing the lake early in season to Twin Cities freeways

16 mins. Avers respect for Indian ways until that gets in the way on part of Corps and Forest Service

Story of Forest Service road, now locked up out of tourist season

Destruction without research.

The Indians get the bad ink

Returns to subject of reservoir function at Headwaters, difference between communities/concerns in the immediate area and Twin Cities perceptions

U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS, ST. PAUL DISTRICT

ORAL HISTORY AGREEMENT FORM

I, Mert Lego, a participant in
an oral history interview recorded on December 15, 1987,
hereby give and deliver to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, St. Paul
District all the incidents of ownership in that interview, including
copyright, from this time forward.

Date December 15, 1987

Signed:

Mert Lego
Donor

General Dan M. 56641
Address

Signed:

J. R. Smith
Interviewer

Transcript
Corps/Mississippi Headwaters Project
Interview with Mert Lego by Jo Blatti
December 15, 1987

Jo Blatti interviewing Merton Lego. This is in an interview series for the Corps of Engineers in their continuing work on the Headwaters Reservoirs oral history project.

INT: Could I just begin by asking, um, a little bit about your family's history in Federal Dam, Minnesota, when people in your family got to the area, and how they got there, what brought them?

ML: Well, um, my mother got there in '10, I'm sure it was ten.

INT: This would be 1910?

ML: Yeah, it'd be the, it'd be the year the railroad there, anyway, 'cus her dad worked on the railroad, on the construction crew. And when they got to Federal Dam and built the round houses, and, well, the division point, is, what it was. He stayed.

INT: And kept on working for the railroad?

ML: Yeah, they, they, I know my mother told me they lived in a boxcar for a year, 'til they got a house built.

INT: Mum.

ML: And they was one of the first. She said that, if I'm not mistaken, there was four houses and some tents. Old Fred Beaulieu, one of the guys that, the man I was telling you about that read the gages and stuff during the war, too, there. Ah, I'm sure that they were stilling living in a tent, my mother said, when she got there.

INT: My goodness. In Minnesota, year-round.

ML: Yeah, you bet. Oh, I imagine they had, um, pretty well fixed up, you know, boards on the sides and floors in them and stuff, but still you know.

INT: Yes, so -

ML: Then ah, they're one of the earliest families I know that were there.

INT: So -

ML: I don't think there's anybody in Federal Dam that ah-. The Neuers got there, I think, right just a year or so after my folks, or after my mother. My dad got there in '14. He come over from the White Earth Indian Reservation over at Waubun.

INT: And he helped, did he work on the dam, or on the railroad or -?

ML: No, no. He was ah, he was only 14 years old when he got there in '14. He come to live with his sister and ah, brother-in-law, the Fairbankses. They had a store and stuff in the early days there, a few years before that.

INT: Oh, there's a Fairbanks family that had a store at Winnibigosh in the 1880s.

ML: There were a lot of storekeepers in the Fairbanks families, you know.

INT: Yeah. That's interesting.

ML: There's an awful lot of Fairbanks in this country, too, scattered through, most of them are Indian people.

INT: Oh, they're Indian people, they're not -

ML: Yeah.

INT: So they came in here early as fur trade people or something?

ML: Well, they was, you know, part Indian, you know.

INT: Mum hum.

ML: My uncle Gus, I think he was about a, Gus Fairbanks, that's who my dad came to live with. I, god, I think my uncle Gus must have been about a half or five-eighths blood or something like that. My dad was a quarter, and ah -

INT: Now your mother's family wasn't Indian, I take it.

ML: No, uh ah.

INT: What, where had they come from, and how -

ML: Chicago.

INT: Ah, ha.

ML: Chicago, yeah. And her mother, let's see now. I believe, I believe, well, that won't have no bearing on the story, but I believe her mother had died already by the time they got here. Maybe not. But anyway, he stayed here, and then, I guess, he, ah, they went into, he went in the gas business, kerosene and stuff, after he left the railroad. Ended up farming. Ended up living out in California. Old Ralph Shoemaker, the guy that come in originally with the railroad.

INT: This is your grandfather?

ML: Mum, hum. And my uncle, he farmed and worked for the Soo line all the time. He, he went to work as a young man with the Soo line and stayed right with them for years and years and years.

INT: So he kept a farm but also -

ML: Yeah, he farmed on the side. Delivered milk around Federal Dam. Raw milk, you know.

INT: Uh ha.

ML: Had the whole town, I think it was about a nickel a quart, or something like that, you know. When I was a kid.

INT: I've noticed that just driving the highway down to Federal Dam, like on Highway 2, it's not very farmlike, but when you turn south to go to Remer or Federal Dam, you begin to see a lot of farms, which kind of surprised me. I guess, I didn't expect to see it.

ML: Yeah, well. They ah, ah, oh I don't know, there was ah, there was, I think the first dam tender I can remember was Hans Olson.

INT: Now, when was he dam tender? This would have been when you were a little boy?

ML: Yeah, yeah, I'm 55. I was born in '32 and I imagine, I suppose, like '38, '39 in there, I think it was Hans Olson, I'm not sure.

INT: Now when you were a boy, what connection did you have with the dams? Was it just -

ML: Not much, but we, we lived on that dam.

INT: Now how did -

ML: Everybody did.

INT: Oh, you mean to -

ML: Swam off it and everything, it wasn't off limits in them days like it is now, you know.

INT: I see.

ML: We went over them falls in wash dishes; we went over them falls in nude, we went over them with our clothes on; you name it and we did it on that dam, you know. And ah, fished off it all the time. They used to have the big log sluice sticking down river there, two big cement piers. And then, they had the fish ladder. We used to, they was kind of projecting out downriver, and we'd stand on them, and of course, you could catch them Northerns.

INT: Oh, oh, is it kosher, or is it fair to catch them on the fish ladder?

ML: Oh, no. This was for the spring run, see.

INT: Ok.

ML: It's a deal that, so they didn't, they couldn't get over the falls, so they stepped them up a little bit at a time. The water would come one side of the wooden structure, and then up a little higher and they just kind of walked them right up.

INT: Could they, they made it, I mean it was -?

ML: Yeah, I think it-. You know, I never did ever see, I don't believe I ever, didn't ever see any fish go up it. But we, it was built downstream from the dam, and we used to stand on the walls of it and cast or fish with a cane pole or whatever.

INT: Oh, so you were using it as your kind of ah, ah, -

ML: Place to fish from, you see.

INT: You weren't fishing into it [the fish ladder], but into the -

ML: No, that's right. And then right along side of it, or close by there was two big cement piers that went out, and that was the log sluice.

INT: Mum hum.

ML: I think that gate is still in the dam, I'm not sure.

INT: I ought to go take another look, because -

ML: It's the widest one of the bunch, you'll see. The rest of them are kind of narrow, and then there's one wide one. And right from that, they used to be heavy, I think it's all concrete now, the apron, what we call the apron, but then it was all plank.

INT: Mum hum.

ML: And we'd ah, we'd stand on the end of this log sluice. There was ladders goin' down to the cement piers, you know, and we'd cast and fish off. We lived on that, that dam was just, you know, it's funny some kids didn't drown but they never did.

INT: Well, that's a good thing.

ML: And then down the river a little ways was a gaging station where they took the, I don't know, the volume of the water goin' down river or somethin'. And of course that took every kid in the country swam off that, you know, jumpin' in the river and spearin' suckers off and everything. But as time went on it all become off limits pretty much to the people, you know.

INT: Was this when you were growing up, or was it -

ML: Yeah, um hum, yeah.

INT: So by the time you were in high school or something you -

ML: Oh, no, high school we still used it some.

INT: I see (laugh).

ML: (laugh) There used to be people lined up in the spring, you know when the evening starts gettin' warm, you know how it is. There used to be people all over that dam watchin' the fish down below and -

INT: So is this kind of a place people congregated -

ML: Yeah, yeah, that was the place we all went. Of course, ah -

INT: Now was the road, did people actually drive across the dam in those days?

ML: Oh, sure.

INT: So, it was a roadway. Now it's not, I under -, the road has been routed around it.

ML: You know, I hauled lots of timber across that dam when I first started loggin'. That's say 1948, '49 in there. I was just a kid, I was haulin' timber. But, ah, we used to have tie cuts where, were cut eight foot six, that's, you know, 102 inches long.

INT: Oh, you mean, for railroad ties or something?

ML: Yeah, but when it was cut in the woods, they was cut, they was in the round, of course. When we'd haul them to town, then they'd square them at the mill. But you'd had to be careful comin' across it. You didn't have much room if you had -

INT: I bet.

ML: Tiestock on your truck, you know.

INT: I bet.

ML: It was really narrow. Yeah, that was a great, that dam was oh-. And then there's just about everybody except, you know, like Ole was a good dam tender. And Hank Sharp, Henry Dart, they was all good people, you know.

INT: And, ah, Hank Sharp was over at Leech Lake, too?

ML: Hank was at Leech Lake. Ah, well, I guess he'd a been under Henry Dart.

INT: Ok. I guess, I guess, I remember that. I'm, I'm asking because I'm trying to get ahold of him. He's out West.

ML: Yeah, Hank's, ah ha he's -

INT: I'm, I'm hoping I can do something with him by telephone, but I've missed him. Ah, I didn't get up here before he took off for his -

ML: Oh, I'm sure he'd be tickled pink to tell you what he knows.

INT: Yeah, yeah.

ML: And then before them, let's see, how the heck was it? Well, like I told you, Anderson.

INT: Mum hum, so this Olaf -

ML: Well, ah, huh, let's see, Ole went, Ole was up at Winni Dam when, when Dart was here.

INT: Mum hum. So the first one you remember would be Olaf Johnson?

ML: Oh, no, I remember, I think Hans Olson was there.

INT: I'm sorry, I'm getting, Hans Olson.

ML: Yeah, yeah.

INT: And then would it have been Carl Anderson?

ML: Anderson come there during the war.

INT: Mum hum.

ML: So it probably would have been Anderson next, yeah.

INT: And then it would have been Henry Dart?

ML: I kind of think so. Let's see, am I leavin' one out there someplace? Yeah, I think Dart and then ah, (pause) I think it was, I think there was a Daniels. I think it was Daniels, or Hans Olson and then Daniels, or, let's see, by golly I don't know, I'm a little confused on, it seems to me though, we lived right by Olson's and seems, and that was, it seems to me that was, was Hans was still dam tender. I think before that there was a Daniels. Did anybody tell you about that?

INT: No, but I can look, I can go and try and find some records.

ML: I might be in -

INT: Yeah, but if I just have a sense of who to look for, then it will be easier to find.

ML: Yeah, yeah. Olson and Daniels, then I think it was Anderson during like '41, '2 and '3 in there, you know.

INT: Mum hum.

ML: And then I think, yeah, then Henry come into the picture, I think, Henry Dart. And I think Ole went to work for Dart after he come out of the service.

INT: Mum hum. I think that's right. That's ah, that's the sense I got, first he worked with Dart then he went to Winni -

ML: Then he went on his own up to Winni.

INT: And then he went back to Leech.

ML: And then he come back to Leech. Yeah, that's right, yeah. I think it was Dart that Ole first started with.

INT: Ok. Now, how did your family - go ahead and finish your -

ML: Then Hank Sharp come in. He'd been workin' on ah, downriver some place on the locks and dam or whatever. Then he come up here under Dart, and then he ended up with Pokegama and he retired out of Pokegama.

INT: Mum hum.

ML: He got MS. What was you going to say about my family?

INT: Your family, you were just mentioning living next door to the Olson's.

ML: Yeah, that was uptown, though.

INT: Pardon.

ML: That was uptown, though.

INT: Oh, I see.

ML: See Hans Olson -

INT: How come he didn't live at the dam?

ML: You know, I don't know. I'm missin' somebody I think, Jo.
(pause)

INT: Maybe he was assistant dam tender for a while or something and lived in town? Although there were two houses there, weren't there?

ML: There was a damtender's quarters and the officers' quarters. We bought the, my brother and I bought the officers' quarters, and that's now down by Longville.

INT: Oh, really, so when, when was that?

ML: Oh, I don't know, fif -, let's see, probably in the seventies, early seventies.

INT: That you bought that and moved it off? Now why did -, what are you doing with it in Longville?

ML: We, ah, we didn't. We bought it and was going to move it to someplace locally, and the lumber dealer, ah, developer down at Longville asked us what we wanted for it. And we had a chance to make a few dollars, so we sold it to him. And he moved it down about, it looks just almost like, it still got the same, ah, slate roof that it had when it was -

INT: Ah.

ML: Beautiful little home, cabin, yeah.

INT: Yeah.

ML: All hardwood floors and, was you in the big house down there?

INT: I've only been outside it; I haven't been in it.

ML: Yeah. Well we was, ah,-

INT: Now your family lived in that house, I understand.

ML: Yes, we did, I was trying to think when, ah.

INT: How did it, I'm surprised that it was leased.

ML: Well, you see they decided, I suppose they was cuttin' corners. Ah, and they didn't have no dam tender there, so they leased it out.

INT: This would have been during the war, the World War II years?

ML: Yeah. Actually, at that time they was thinkin' about selling it.

INT: Mum hum.

ML: And ah, I've, I've been, I've been questioned on this several times. But ah, what they was goin to sell was ah, was the everything kind of west of, there used to be a little road went right up through the Corps of Engineers property, and the warehouses was on one side of the road and the living quarters and a garage for the damtender and stuff, and a barn and the gardens and stuff was on the west side of the road towards to boat landings. You know where they are?

INT: Yeah.

ML: All right, that's the way that was. We had a big garden. You know where Tonga's boat landing is now?

INT: Yes, I do.

ML: Ok, right next to him, we had a nice big garden, right there. It's all full of trees and stuff now that they planted, but that was a big garden.

INT: Oh, now that's interesting. Go ahead and tell me what else your family had there.

ML: And then ah, the barn was ah, well, if you drove in there, to the house, did you drive in the yard?

INT: Yeah, I just walked right in.

ML: There's a garage here -

INT: Yes

ML: And up here is the house. Right south of the garage was a nice barn. I had cattle in there, and ah, the year, we must of had at least, a year, a winter or so before we moved down there, because I know I had a horse and a -. Oh, there used to be a chicken coop, too, a nice chicken coop. It was really a neat lookin' spread. And I had a couple cows and a horse and chickens, and I'd go down, there every night after school and take care of 'em and water 'em and stuff.

INT: Now were the cows milk cows or beef cows?

ML: No, they was beef then. But I suppose that thing was all set up that way so that in '84, they needed a cow and a team of horses and, you know. It was a neat place, boy. It's too bad that it was, it's just too bad they sell off them places like that, you know.

INT: So when your family lived in it in the '40s, all of the -

ML: Excuse me, just made me think, the barn is uptown now.

INT: Oh, is it, where?

ML: It's, Norman Miller bought that and made a shop out of it. And ah, and one of the, another building is up there where my son lives. Some property that I bought and give to my son. Ah, what building was that? That was one of the out buildings down there.

INT: It's used for a garage or -?

ML: Yeah, my son's usin' it for a garage now, but I think it was, hum, I don't know, I don't remember. It seems to me it was, ah, it was a workshop of some kind, you know.

INT: Well, the old maps showed kind of a wonderful complex of buildings.

ML: Oh, yeah, that was neat, you know.

[MACHINE SHUTS ITSELF OFF MOMENTARILY.]

INT: You can, I mean, those things weren't -

ML: No, but how it was built. I mean, I'm sure it didn't change much from the time I can remember seeing it, from the time it was built, you know what I mean.

INT: Yeah.

ML: The barn sure hadn't been moved. Have you got a picture of it?

INT: I do, I do. I brought some maps.

ML: I'd like to see that.

[INTERVIEWER UNROLLS MAPS OF FEDERAL DAM FACILITY.]

INT: And, wanted you to look at them with me.

ML: The buildings I was never too familiar was, was the ones across -

INT: These are kind of in ah, year by year, but let's see, here -

ML: There's the barn, see.

INT: Now here's the house, and here's, this must have been the officers' quarters.

ML: Mum hum.

INT: And then here's the garage, and that must be the -

ML: Shed.

INT: That must be the shed on your son's. Now this shows, -

ML: There's the -

INT: The, oh, I thought the line [between concessions and Corps activities] went this way, but it goes this way, so that ah -

ML: See, here's that old road I was tellin' you about.

INT: Yeah, and, of course, what I did was to come up this way.

ML: Sure.

INT: And then to, then I walked back up in here, where the old ware, the new warehouse is. And past -

ML: Yeah, that's on this side of the road.

INT: Yeah. And -

ML: Here's where I live now.

INT: Oh, oh, so you live on the other side of the dam? [Right next to present Corps campground]

ML: Mum hum.

INT: Ahm.

ML: Yeah, that's the way it was. That was the chicken coop.

INT: Oh, ho. Let me borrow your pen and write that down.

ML: I guess maybe, that's what we -.

[MACHINE OFF MOMENTARILY]

INT: My tape recorder is very funny. It gets to a certain point in the tape, and it starts shutting off. Ok, now, and then you had your gardens out here.

ML: No, no, no, right here.

INT: Oh, I'm in the wrong direction.

ML: Mum hum.

INT: I have another map that I used with um, and here this one, this one -. Were any of these buildings here, the blacksmith shop or the warehouse?

ML: No, that's what, I think that's, I think the blacksmith. Let me see that; I think the blacksmith shop is the one that's up to my son's.

INT: Oh.

ML: I was gonna say that a minute ago. Ah, no, (pause) huh. [Much rattling of maps.] Oh, I see, (pause) boat house, oh, I see, the boat house was there.

INT: Oh, now let's see.

ML: That was across the road from the big house. What year was this, does it say.

INT: It's right here. It's this -

ML: 1929?

INT: 1962.

ML: Oh, yeah. I see.

INT: These are the water levels.

ML: Oh, yeah.

INT: That's what Irv Seelye told me yesterday.

ML: Oh, yeah.

INT: So all this stuff was here in 1962? Do you remember -

ML: Well, the boat, I don't, I don't remember if the boat house was, but the boat house was there when I was there.

INT: Ok.

ML: In the '40s.

INT: And these things. These are some of the buildings, these, the work complex here, you think is the stuff that got moved off.

ML: Mum hum.

INT: And then your family, had now, I want to ask you about the ah, the boat landing, not the boat landing, but the boat liveries. Because here's the ah, here's the house, and here the boat house doesn't show anymore on these maps.

ML: No

INT: Ahm, but these were ah -,

ML: Here, what we're up against here Jo, the boat house.

INT: Your family, now this is Tonga's right here.

ML: This is, yeah, this is in later days, see.

INT: These are later, now where were the, where were the -

ML: See when we live there all, they was all in the river side across the road when I was being brought up there.

INT: Now where, where on the map -

ML: Here.

INT: Yeah, they were where now?

ML: There were here on this side of the road towards - They was between the road, the road that goes down there now?

INT: Yeah.

ML: All these, Wescott's and all them was on the river side hangin' right out over the bank, most of them.

INT: Oh, so they were between the house and the -

ML: No, no, they was (pause).

INT: You mean they were here?

ML: No, no.

INT: Ok.

ML: Wait now, house, let's see now.

INT: Here's the house. Ok, here's the dam. This is turned around; this map is the other way to. Here's the dam here, and here's the house -

ML: Ok.

INT: And your garden would've been here.

ML: And here's the boat house.

INT: Right.

ML: The big house was, that don't lay right. The boat house was right in front of the (pause).

INT: Now this is an older map, so they might have, they might have -

ML: Yeah, but we used to come out of that house, the big house and walk right down the sidewalk, which is still there, I am sure, and there was a gate there.

INT: Yeah.

ML: Across the road and there was the boat house.

INT: Ok, so the boat house is right directly in front of the house when you were growing up there.

ML: Mum hum.

INT: Now where were the livery, the launch services -

ML: Oh, this boat house. That didn't belong to the Corps.

INT: Oh, who did it belong to?

ML: That belonged to ah, ah, Moscrip and Heller in those days.

INT: To whom?

ML: Moscrip probably or Heller, it could have been.

INT: You mean, were they concession people? Were they running, ah, -

ML: Yeah.

INT: Ok, now where were the concessions in those days?

ML: Well, they'd be

INT: Down here?

ML: They'd be scattered along in here. Yeah.

INT: Oh, so, so that's where they are now, but they're -.

ML: No, but they're on the river side, see. Now, all the offices and stuff is on the, is across the road from the river. When I was a kid, all the offices were on the river side.

INT: Oh, I see, I see. So, they used to be here, and now they're here.

ML: Yeah.

INT: Ok, got it, got it. It was snowing, and I was just walking on open land, and I wasn't paying attention to whether there was a road or not. Let's, that I was very curious about, so that's why your family was gardening then where Tonga's boat house is now, because -

ML: Well, where Tonga's office is now, our garden was right up against the fence next to his -

INT: Ok, and so, but his little thing [office] would have been down here somewhere.

ML: Yeah, right, mum hum.

INT: Ok, ok. Who were running the launch services when you were a boy living there?

ML: Ah, Heller -

INT: Mum hum.

ML: Louie Heller, I think his name was Louie.

INT: Yeah.

ML: And Frank Condon.

INT: Mum hum.

ML: And Bridges.

INT: Mum hum.

ML: And just before Bridges, it was Clark's. See Warren, he, he got there probably, I don't know just when. But I know, I think ah, he must have gotten there after I was born, I'm sure.

INT: So this would be Warren whose -

ML: Warren Bridge.

INT: And his father Harold whose -

ML: Harold, mum hum.

INT: Who's even more a senior, really started that business in the -

ML: No, they bought it from Clark's.

INT: Oh, ok.

ML: And then ah, let's see now, there was Heller on the very end, and Bill Moscrip from Lake Elmo had a boat house there. He didn't, he didn't have a concession, he didn't haul for hire. He just had it to keep his -

INT: His own stuff in.

ML: Yeah.

INT: Was he a summer visitor, or what did he live in -.

ML: Yeah, he had a big place out on the west side of Portage Bay. And he had a, they, both Heller and, Heller was built on an old mill site. His boat sit out there. And they had a long -

INT: Pier?

ML: Boardwalk goin' out to his place. Well then, right along his boardwalk one went out to Bill Moscrip's, he was a big dairy man from Lake Elmo. Ok, then the next one, going back toward the dam was Frank Condon, and he was built between the present road now and the river.

INT: Mum.

ML: He wasn't on the back side like all the offices are now.

INT: Ok.

ML: His ice house and everything was in there.

INT: He had an ice house?

ML: Yeah, they all packed ice -

INT: For the fish?

ML: In them days, you know.

INT: Oh, I, so they ran livery services in the summer, and they packed ice to sell in the winter?

ML: I said, no, no, to ship the fish.

INT: Oh, I see.

ML: Keep the fish.

INT: Of course.

ML: And the next one goin' back towards the dam from Condon would be Bridges. And then, ah, then the Neuer boys started. Neuer boys started the next one, and old Bill Worcester had the next one, which was ah, ah, Warren Bridge, ended up being Warren Bridges.

INT: I see.

ML: And that's where, I forget there name now. The new people just brought Bridge out there. The next one to Tonga.

INT: Ah, Sandew.

ML: Yeah. And Tonga's place, there was no place there.

INT: Mum hum.

ML: Sandew's would be about the last. That was Bill Worcester's. Warren got that from Bill and the Neuer boys; that's where the restaurant is now.

INT: Mum hum.

ML: They built that up. And then my dad, oh, about '43 or in there, my dad bought out Heller. That's the one way on the end again, goin' back. And Condon sold out to ah, (pause) Simms, Simms and Sawyer, Ray Sawyer and Tony Simms, who sold to Spellman, and we ended up with it. In fact, my partner and I just, we just moved a building away from there. Did you notice -?

INT: I noticed that one is off its foundations.

ML: Yeah, we just, that's a, we just bought that last spring and then the Corps -

INT: So what are you going to do with the building? Do you know yet?

ML: We moved it uptown; we're settin' it up uptown.

INT: Is it going to be a bait shop and livery service or -

ML: No, no, just a, we're going to make a cabin out of it.

INT: Ah ha.

ML: But yeah, that was a, that was quite a, that was a-going, that was a-goin -

INT: Now, I'm not counting as you talk because there are so many names going past, but there are more than, you're naming more than five concessions.

ML: Because they've been sold, see.

INT: But there was always were more or less five or six right there?

ML: There were always five houses. Ok, goin, gettin' to what I said there a while ago, there was Louie Heller, -

INT: Mum hum.

ML: They owned the one on the very end.

INT: Ok.

ML: Bill Moscrip just had a boathouse, private boathouse.

INT: Right.

ML: Right next to his. Then there was Frank Condon, that'd be the second concession.

INT: Ok.

ML: And then there was Bridges.

INT: In the middle.

ML: Yeah, and then the Neuer boys guided for Bridges, and then they started their own, -

INT: Ok.

ML: So then there'd be the Neuer boys. And old Bill Worcester

INT: So there were -

ML: And that was five see, but Worcester sold to Warren and so on when Warren come back -

INT: So that it got to be a lot of changes.

ML: Yeah. And everyone of um's changed hands -

INT: Right.

ML: Several times over the years.

INT: I talked to Mr. Staley on Sunday.

ML: Yeah.

INT: And he's one of the newer, I mean, I guess he's now the oldest owner, but he's one of the newer people certainly.

ML: You know, he is; he is the oldest one, but he is new.

INT: Yeah, yeah

ML: Compared to, yeah.

INT: Yeah, so now where -

ML: Warren just got out; see Warren would've been the oldest.

INT: Mum hum.

ML: But he just got out, Warren Bridge.

INT: Now, ah, were all of the people who ran the boat livery services Federal Dam people?

ML: No, uh ah. Bridges comes from a -

[MACHINE SHUT ITSELF OFF MOMENTARILY]

INT: I'm sorry, Bridges came from Iowa.

ML: Yeah, yeah, and Hellers were from Missouri.

INT: Mum hum.

ML: And they'd just spend the summers up here and go back to Missouri in the winter time.

INT: Let me just turn this over, just one second.

Tape 1, Side 2

INT: Ok, and then what -

ML: Bill Worcester was one of the old, old timers. And the Neuer boys, of course, was native Federal Damers, you know. They come there, well, their family, like Gary -, I don't know if, this is '87, I think Gary, Gary was probably born at Federal Dam, I don't know if he was -, anywhere, they're old -, old family.

INT: Mum hum.

ML: And ah, Frank Condon, he come from Kansas and I think he got there in the early '30s, started his -.

INT: Mum hum.

ML: And, of course, Bridges come from Iowa.

INT: Oh, that's interesting, because, you know, my imagination when I looked at these, particularly the older fliers was that all the fish guide services were run by people who were native to the area and that a lot of the people might have been Indians. Sometimes I could tell that they were, because of the way it was advertised that the guides were advertised as Indian people. But that apparently, was that something that was going on at Federal Dam or -?

ML: Well, most of your -, I think you had a whole lot more Indian guides over on Winni than you did on Leech. 'Cus you had ah, the Lyonses, Bill and Charlie Lyons had a, they was, they was Indians, and they had a nice, really good operation. Had all their sons and nephews and stuff guiding for them. That was right in Remer, or ah Bena. Then you get up near the dam, you had a lot of them old guides like Ted Fairbanks, Percy Lyons and them you know, that was all Indian guides. I think Winni was by far -. Well, Leech Lake itself had lots and lots of Indian guides.

INT: Mum hum.

ML: I think that you'd find the most of them was over on the Whipholt side and Walker, Brevik -

INT: I was noticing when I came through -

ML: Sugar Point, down in that area, but -

INT: Yeah.

ML: They didn't, Federal Dam, well I can, I can, I can almost name um whose, Indians that guided there. It was Porky Whitesome and Jim Drumbeater, Willie Drumbeater, occasionally, not very much. And a fellow by the name of Jim Cloud guided for Bridge and Alex Sears for my dad and a few other people, I suppose, 'cus we owned an outfit there.

INT: Mum hum.

ML: I don't know. I suppose maybe, I don't know, there wasn't a whole lot of Indians guidin' out of Federal Dam, but a lot of em guidin' on Leech Lake, you know.

INT: Mum hum. Now how long did your father actually own a concession?

ML: Holy smokes, I don't know. He must of had that a couple two, three years, anyway.

INT: And this would have been in the '40s, during the war?

ML: Yeah.

INT: Was there a lot of, as you remembered, I realize that you were a kid then, but did the war really ah, ah, make for quieter business in the, in the area?

ML: Oh, yeah. Like Frank Condon, he closed his and he went to defense plants. And ah, Bridges stayed open. And dad bought Heller out. He ah, he stayed open. Bill Worcester I'm sure. Neuer boys I think they started, they was logging during the war, I think, yeah. Yeah I'm pretty sure that's the way. Yeah, it slowed um up some.

INT: Mum hum. It wasn't -

ML: I remember we had ah, Joe Foss, great ace, you know.

INT: No, I don't but he -

ML: Governor of South Dakota, after he come out of the service, he was one of our war aces.

INT: Oh.

ML: Great pilot. I remember he come fished with us. He was married to a girl from Bemidji.

INT: Ah,ha.

ML: Yeah.

INT: So.

ML: Boy that was a big day down around the waterfront there,-

INT: Big -

ML: 'Cus he was home on leave see.

INT: Oh, how, oh, he must have been visiting his wife's family or something.

ML: Yeah.

INT: Come over, so, local hero of a way. Yeah.

ML: Yeah.

INT: Now how did, I mean you were telling me about, I just wondered how your family just came to lease the property.

ML: Well. I guess we started talkin' about that. Ah, they, there was some talk that it was gonna be sold. Everything west of the road.

INT: That's right, that's when we got off into the gardens and the concessions.

ML: Including the concession leases and stuff. They were gonna put that up for bids, and I don't know if they were gonna, the five guys that were on the concessions, if they were gonna let them

bid on the concession, on their lease or if there was gonna be one bid and then whoever got it they would get the -. Well, my dad got interested, and he went to St. Paul and spent a quite a lot time on it.

INT: Oh, so he went down to the Corps office?

ML: He wanted to buy it.

INT: Oh, I see.

ML: He wanted to, he wanted to make sure he got a chance to bid on it. And ah, anyway, it was ah, old Mont Thorson was a counsel to the senate at that time and did the work, did the investigating for him and stuff. He was a guy that hunted with my dad.

INT: Mum hum.

ML: And, knew his way around St. Paul. And they decided they couldn't sell it. And I've asked these guys up here on the res [reservation] to check that out many times, because it was given to them by Leech Lake Indians, and in the event they was done with it, it reverted back.

INT: Isn't that interesting.

ML: Now that's got an awful, that, that -. Nobody's talked about that in later years. I've been talkin' about it ever since I -. I can remember it like it was yesterday. And ah, dad said that's the reason we can't buy it. I heard him tell the story many, many times.

INT: Ah.

ML: There's a reversion clause in there to the Leech Lake Indians. When the property is done, it goes back to them.

INT: Mum hum.

ML: So as a result, they didn't sell the property, didn't put it up for bids, but they rented the big house out to us. And I'm trying to think, it seems to me I missed a damtender someplace.

INT: Huh.

ML: Trying to think, when we moved out who was the next one. And I guess it was Henry Dart. I guess it was.

INT: So your family moved out then at the end of a lease, or because a new damtender came in?

ML: We, I think it was only, I think the lease was only good for a year at a time. But you know about how the Corps would let out a lease, very carefully, you know. And they kept themselves covered so, as soon as they decided to put a damtender back in there, I imagined that's the way it was planned.

INT: Mum hum.

ML: That's the way it turned out. Because we had, we had ninety days or I don't know how many days notice they gave the folks. We must of lived there, they built that house uptown in '49.

INT: You mean your folks?

ML: Yeah, and, we lived a year in a house, another house that they owned that they had rented out. And ah, when we left to move down there we sold our home up town. So they didn't have a house. He owned a couple of houses in town, so he, ah, he moved into the one just for temporary while he built the new one. It was an old two-story house, one of the old original house in Federal Dam. So we lived there, and I know the new home was built in '49. So we must of lived there, we must of moved out of there maybe in '46 or '47.

INT: Mum hum.

ML: He probably got there in, my god, we must of lived there four years or so. Yeah, we must - what a place, you know.

INT: Mum hum. You really liked living there.

ML: Oh, that was a nice spot, yeah.

INT: Was it the house -

ML: He was, we had a lot of people coming to hunt with us and stuff. The boat house was right over the road. We could come home from school at night and jump in that boat and be on the river huntin', and there was somethin' to hunt in them days.

INT: Mum hum, mum hum. Has the, the game gone down?

ML: Well, yeah, yeah. Yeah, you know, the Corps has got their job and stuff, but the Corps has killed the river, you know. The river below, between the dams, you know. Between Mud Lake and that. I think it is pretty well full of fish now because the dam went out at Mud Lake, you know. And it had a chance to distribute a lot of fish in there. They just got it built back a year ago or so. That's pretty dead, that's pretty dead country down there from Federal Dam to Mud Lake.

INT: Mum.

ML: I mean, about the time, you know, if they got a -. We're a reservoir, and I guess that's what you got to remember. If they need water down in the metropolitan area, that's what we're sittin' here on that Lake for, you know, to give it to them, I guess.

INT: I suppose that's true, although what I'm, I, what I'm wondering is, it's been operated as a reservoir for almost a hundred, well for over a hundred years.

ML: Well, since time I guess, since it was built.

INT: And, um, you would have been growing up and hunting, beginning to hunt at, as I suspect you have all your life.

ML: Yeah.

INT: When it was, well what, seventy years old? Sixty years old. So would it be the reservoir only that would, you know -

ML: Oh, no, there's other things that add to it, too. Is that what you mean? Oh, you bet.

INT: What else do you think is, you know -

ML: Yeah, us, we, we kill too many, I suppose, you know, over the years people have. But it's bad, Jo, it really is, because I've seen, I've seen on the river a mink. I mean when they decide to start discharging in the spring; I've seen minks swimming, and all at once the river comes up three, four feet, you know. I've seen minks swimmin' across the river with little mink in their mouth tryin' to move um, you know, they were floodin' um out, you know.

INT: Mum hum.

ML: And also the ducks, you know. They, they get their nest made; they always nest quite a ways back from water. And the river might be low when the ducks get in there in the spring. And then, bang they open that baby up, and they push enough water back. I, they've killed more game, I suppose, with discharging water. And the rats, all the fur bearers, you know, ah, they -

INT: You mean muskrats?

ML: Yeah.

INT: Not rat, rats.

ML: Actually, actually we -. We, we had a rice farm right down the river, and we seen a -. One day they raised the water, and this mink was carrying her little ones, swimmin' across the river with this little mink in her mouth, you know, trying to find a place to put it, I suppose.

INT: Mum hum.

ML: She was gettin' flooded out.

INT: They like to live in crevasses and rocks, don't they?

ML: Oh, yeah, most of them have dams dug in someplace, you know. It's pretty much all peat soil down there. It's great country. It's wild country.

INT: Mum hum. Now you and your brother, I wanted to ask a little bit about the wild ricing. I understand that you and your brother, or your brother perhaps, I'm not sure how, have or had a big paddy that's -

ML: Yeah. We was, we was one of the first, kind of like there were three or four of us started that paddy business.

INT: When did you get into that?

ML: '68 is when we started.

INT: Mum hum.

ML: No, '67, I guess. My dad died in '6-, it was '67.

INT: And how big is the paddy?

ML: Oh, we had about a section of land, and we kept about 300 acres active, you know.

INT: That's really, now were you the first people to put in that kind of operation?

ML: We was one of the first ones. The Kasbos up at Cas, up at Waskish, and Francis Brink started the same -. Yeah, we was one of the first. Bud Anderson was the very first, I guess. Him and old Algot Johnson, the old contractor from -

INT: Algot Johnson?

ML: Algot

INT: Algot

ML: Algot Johnson, yeah, he ah, Al Johnson construction from Aitken. He monkeyed around with it up in the Waskish area for years.

INT: Mum hum.

ML: In fact, he's the one that, actually, probably figured out all the angles.

INT: So all of you could then come in, you mean?

ML: And then Uncle Ben Wild Rice come in trying to get a more stable supply. We couldn't supply 'um, enough off the lakes, you know.

INT: Mum hum. Oh, so that was -

ML: That was our business, that we, my dad before us and us, my brother and I, was, we bought off the lakes, bought rice off the lakes.

INT: I see. Was that your family's primary business?

ML: Well, my dad was a store keeper, and ah, kind of a land developer.

INT: I see. Mum hum.

ML: He owned the liquor store and couldn't walk into it because of his Indian blood. (laugh)

INT: Oh, oh.

ML: I always like to tell that story. It's kind of humorous.

INT: So he could just kind of receive the bank accounts, huh?

ML: Well, he bought it, never thinking he was going to run into the problem.

INT: Mum hum.

ML: Because as long as he, he'd been able to go in and that, and all at once ah, a little political, a little political friction started in the town. And they, someone remembered that he was a quarter blood Indian, so they, they ah, held a council meeting and -. But he'd put the, he'd put the, like, he, he, always expected it to surface, so he put the license in my mother's name.

INT: Mum hum.

ML: But pretty soon it got so he couldn't even go in, for a while he couldn't even go in to check the till, you know.

INT: Oh my goodness.

ML: He had the grocery store right across the street from it. But, that's the way, that's the way small towns are, too, you know.

INT: So, so, a big, well, I assume a good-sized business would have been, this Uncle Ben's thing -

ML: Oh --- --- on the rice?

INT: Yes

ML: Ok, then Uncle Ben, Algot Johnson did most of it.

INT: Mum hum.

ML: Bud Anderson had a store up at Max, a little, little bitty town up by Squaw Lake. He monkeyed with it. And when he got his, his brothers up at Waskish, who was grain farmers and they got them, started working with them. Uncle Ben started with them.

INT: Mum hum.

ML: Put some money in um. And they done a lot of looking around already, themselves, these guys. In fact, there's one of the hybrid seeds is named after them, K-2 it's called, Kasbo, you know.

INT: Mum hum.

ML: K-2. But they were, they got goin' and then the word got out. And right away, ah, they'd been in it a couple years and started raising and being pretty successful. And right away we started losin' our clout on the buying, commission buyers off the lakes.

INT: You were, you were buying from the Indian community?

ML: Yeah, we were buying with Indians, whites, everybody -

INT: And other people who, anybody who was ah -

ML: We used to buy 20%. For many years we bought about 20% of the state's crop, my brother and I.

INT: No kidding.

ML: Yeah. We was the biggest green rice buyers in the state. We had 200 boats. [Note: Unprocess rice is called 'green' rice.]

INT: Mum. Oh, so you would furnish boats for people to go out and -

ML: We would furnish boats. So water levels was always really important to us, 'cus high water's hell on rice, you know. But ah -

INT: So you'd be among the people who'd be in there banging on the Corps door if -

ML: Yeah. Mum hum.

INT: If the discharges were higher than you could -

ML: Yeah, we was also the people that was down there, we spent thousands of dollars trying to keep this university and stuff from growing this rice (laugh).

INT: Well, I wondered -

ML: All of us rice buyers, yeah.

INT: There's a big rice paddy isn't there, and a big experimental paddy?

ML: Oh, there's thousands of acres.

INT: Yeah.

ML: And of course, the university's workin' steady with it, you know.

INT: Mum hum.

ML: And doin' a good job, unfortunately.

INT: (Laugh) At least you've got a sense of humor about it.

ML: Yeah, but right away our business started goin' to hell.

INT: Ah ha.

ML: We weren't important anymore.

INT: Ah, ha.

ML: Say, ah, heck with you guys we're not not gonna -

INT: We'll grow our own.

ML: We're not gonna pay you that much commission. We'll buy it from some paddy grower, you know.

INT: Mum hum.

ML: So we decided, you can't whip um, we joined um. We quit fightin', and we joined um.

INT: Mum hum. And this would have been in '67, '68, when you started operating your -

ML: Yeah, '67 when we started. And three years later, the reservation started theirs, a small paddy at the same time. And three years later, god, I ain't been here that long. Let's see, I think I've been here 15 years. Anyway, a few years later, after, we had ours all built and everything, they built ones. They weren't havin' too much luck for it; they asked me to come up here and I started. Well, well, in '74 I started. Well, their loggin' outfit, I know, for the reservation -.

INT: Mum hum.

ML: So, it must have been, maybe, '73 I come to work for them. Yeah, it's been about 14, 15 years.

INT: So you kind of got into being, to working with the reservation through your own experience -

ML: I got out of the rice business 'cus it was, you couldn't make and money anymore.

INT: Ah ha, so your family isn't -

ML: In this area we couldn't do it, Jo. Up in Waskish and Clearbrook area where they got them huge flat -

INT: Mum hum.

ML: You know, chunks of ground to work with they could do it. Here, if we couldn't find a little piece of bog that was a couple hundred acres, we couldn't get big enough to keep, to compete. You know, that's what it amounts to. We was the biggest in this area, but still wasn't big enough.

INT: Ah huh. Is your family out of the rice business now?

ML: No, we're still in it, ah, but we're not no factor any more.

INT: Yeah. Huh.

ML: We're thinkin' about goin' back to the lake. So is the reservation.

INT: Ah huh.

ML: Just to try to work on that no spraying, no chemicals, no nothing.

INT: I noticed that when I was down at Federal Dam that -. I was asking the difference between the shiny dark rice and the lighter, and the lady who ran the store was telling me that one was paddy and one was -

ML: No, you see, that's a fallacy, that's, they always try to use that, that's absolutely wrong. That's as wrong as it can be.

INT: Oh, well tell me what -

ML: You can make paddy rice just as light as, as lake rice. It just depends on what plant finished it.

INT: Ah huh. Ok.

ML: If you polished it, what we call polish it, you're gonna have light rice. I don't care if it's paddy, lake or what -

INT: Ok.

ML: But they all say that. You know, the people, they don't know. So that's how it is. Dark as paddy. 'Cus the paddy people, the paddy people, the plants, the big plants that haul, handle these huge volumes now, they got sophisticated equipment now. They can't make light rice, because the lake I gi -. If they take lake, light rice I mean.

INT: Mum hum.

ML: If they take lake rice, it'll come out just as black as the paddy, 'cus of their method of processing, see.

INT: I see, it's the method; it's not the rice itself.

ML: Yeah, it's the machinery. A barrel huller like this man's got right south of town here, he'll get you light rice, because he uses it rougher in order to get the hull off and stuff. And as a result, you rub some of the outside bran off the middle. And that's how he does it. And you also lose a lot of the good food value on that. But I still want, but I grew up on the light rice, because the old fashioned way of finishing it always made it light, you know.

INT: Mum hum, mum hum.

ML: Was that Dolly, the Indian gal in there?

INT: I think it was; I didn't get her first name.

ML: Yeah, she's a good gal, but that's it, you know. I run into that all the time. I had it here with these people, everyone of them you know, they, oh, that black paddy stuff, I -, you know. Finally had to prove it to 'um.

INT: (laugh) Uh huh. So you did a demonstration?

ML: I started making it black.

INT: Oh, that's interesting.

ML: That's paddy rice, isn't it? It's a lake, you bought it off the lake, didn't you? Oh, you got to make it lighter than that. So then they finally found out here, the powers that are, that it's solved out at the plant, it ain't that ah -

INT: Yeah, it's not where it grows, or even what seed it is?

ML: No way.

INT: Oh, that's interesting. Well now, you've disabused, you know, you've made me an educated consumer.(laugh)

ML: I've had so many people eat paddy rice. Light, I always have some rice done over here, because I grew up on that light rice. I like light rice, and ah, I also went to, grew enough for my home and friends and stuff, regardless if it was paddy or lake; I didn't bother to get lake, I'd take paddy up, you know. I had more people eat that. Everybody thinks it's lake rice because it's light. God, that's good rice; they're eating paddy rice. (laugh)

INT: (laugh)

ML: I've eaten as much rice as anybody walking, I think, and I can't tell the difference if it's both done at the plant.

INT: Oh, that's interesting. So, -

ML: Both done at the same time, I should say.

INT: Now, did your family have it's own processing stuff, or did you -

ML: No, no, we never did.

INT: Did you -

ML: My dad did after, in a way. Him and there used to be an old store keeper in Bena, wealthy old man. Got into Bena, I guess, maybe about the time the dam was built, I don't know.

INT: Mum hum.

ML: Winni Dam, probably.

INT: Mum hum.

ML: Sure, I think Winni Dam was built about ten years after Leech, wasn't it?

INT: I believe it was; I have to look it up.

ML: Did Seelye ever show you them (pause). Seelye had a diary, ah, a separate -

INT: A log?

ML: A superintendent's diary.

INT: No, he talked to me about having read some things in it.

ML: Someone took 'um, I guess. You know, maybe they put them in the -

INT: No, I think that they have been, um, sent down to St. Paul. I've seen some. In fact, I've your family's name in some of those old log books. Ah, when I first started working on these interviews a year ago, and kind of went through the Corps office, saying what have you guys got around that will help me, you know, when I go up there and talk with people in that area. Hardly anything could be found. In the year since I've done the first interviews and since they've had another person do some architectural work for them on the damtenders' housing, the stuff is beginning to come out of the woodworks. And of one of the things that came out was a bunch of old log books for Winni and Leech. Marvelous kind of like, the inventories for what they were feeding people -

ML: Yeah, yeah.

INT: All the names of all the people who were working on building the dams at Winni and Leech, and one of the first things I saw was the Lego name, because, ah, the ah, ahm, I had interviewed Ole Henderson, and he had mentioned that your brother and the rice paddy.

ML: Mum hum.

INT: And so that was the first time that I heard the Lego name, but when I saw it in the books, I thought well this family's been around for a long, long time.

ML: Yeah.

INT: And did your father, or some of his relatives work on the ah, the dam itself, do you know?

ML: Building it?

INT: Yeah.

ML: No, I don't think any of, no.

INT: I have to go back and look at this, at the accounts again.

ML: He might worked there afterwards, you know.

INT: Maybe, maybe.

ML: Like in '14, '15 in there.

INT: 'Cus they did a major reconstruction of each of the dams around 1910, 1914.

ML: Yeah.

INT: That ah, ah, would have brought in, a lot of the same people, or their children might have come in.

ML: Yeah. Another name, ah, I don't know though, another name you probably should watch for is Ed Rawley.

INT: Ok, Rawley?

ML: Rewley. No it was, Rawley.

INT: Ok.

ML: Great old man. He was an Indian guy.

INT: And his family was in Federal Dam when you were -

ML: Yeah, I think, I think he was in this area then. He come from the White Earth Reservation, but I think he was in this area in the early part of -

INT: Now your family came from White Earth, too, is that right?

ML: Yeah, my dad.

INT: Your father's - family.

ML: Yeah, my mother from Chicago.

INT: Is Lego, where does that last name come from?

ML: French.

INT: That's what I wondered.

ML: Yeah, yeah, my grandfather was a, my great-grandfather was a French Canadian and married a Wisconsin Chippewa, a full-blooded Wisconsin Chippewa.

INT: And they kind of moved west as the Chippewa moved west.

ML: Yeah, now they ended up in Wisconsin, he did.

INT: Oh, uh huh.

ML: My grandfather was born in Wisconsin. And my grandmother in Alabama. They come up after the war, you know, everything all shot to hell in the Civil War.

INT: Mum hum.

ML: And, they lived in St. Croix Falls, I think, grandpa with my dad's dad and mother. And then they, you see they were goin to make White Earth the one reservation, they were gonna [pause, interrupted for telephone message] so they ah.

INT: You were telling me about your folks meeting in St. Croix and heading toward White Earth, that was -

ML: Dad was born in ah, in St. Croix Falls. I was down there, by the way, ah, me and my partner, ah, July, I guess, June or July. And ah, we ah, I started asking around, and I got some names in my pocket now.

INT: Mum hum.

ML: Someone sent my mother in '68, when my dad died, they sent her a little picture of the Lego boys on, at Wolf Creek, ah, ah, Wolf Creek, Wisconsin. It, it, I think my dad was like this. [gestures - solemn; hands at sides image]

INT: Really.

ML: In front of an old log house there.

INT: Ah hah.

ML: Well anyway, then they was goin' to make White Earth one big reservation. There was going to be no Leech Lake, no nothing, White Earth was going to be where they were goin' to put all the Indians forever. So my grandfather, they sent him to White Earth to take a land claim.

INT: Mum hum.

ML: So, he'd a been half-breed, see.

INT: Mum hum.

ML: So they got over there, and then of course that how, then they come back this way. Weren't allotted any land.

INT: Mum, now why would that offend -

ML: He was too young.

INT: Ah.

ML: But him and his next, him and his next oldest brother, all the rest of the kids were allotted.

INT: Oh, they were the youngest, so they couldn't register; they were too young to enroll?

ML: Yeah, the law either went out of effect by the time my dad was to get an allotment, or something. I don't know just how that went.

INT: Got to be real complicated I -

ML: Yeah, it's like that; it's like all these reservation projects, you know.

INT: Yeah.

ML: You know, they screw 'em up somehow, you know.

INT: Irv Seelye was telling me about the complexities of -
I have to turn -.

Tape 2, Side 1

INT: Since your own family is part Indian, I wondered if you had any dealings with the Corps of Engineers that had to do with that Indianness, or that the Corps itself was much of a factor in some of the professional work that you do with the Leech Lake Reservation.

ML: No, just on the rice, would be about the only thing you know. My dad worked on that Headwaters thing. So they got, oh, what was it? They was tryin' to establish a minimum discharge.

INT: Mum hum.

ML: You know. That was, that was one of the originals on that, I'm sure.

INT: You mean in the early '60s when that, yeah - so -

ML: Yeah, yeah, yeah. And then they was trying to get a project in ah, and I understand there's no blueprints around on that, but

I've seen it. Ah, they was tryin' to put in 1,200 acres of wildlife land, ah, downriver from Federal Dam.

INT: Toward the Mud Lake?

ML: Yeah, in three pieces.

INT: Mum hum.

ML: About three 400 acre pieces. And they was goin' to dike out the river, so they could go ahead and discharge all they wanted, you know, for from the reservoir.

INT: Mum hum.

ML: And we was goin' to maintain a level over these big bogs, these big ah, these big ah rip gut swamps and stuff next to the river. And I seen the blueprint, and they did a little preliminary work on them, I remember one time, we, there was some guys come up and did some, a little surveyin' and I imagine some soil testing. Our loggin' road went along the river and they was usin' that. I think that was in the '50s, later '50s, maybe.

INT: Now was this a project with Leech Lake or with ah -?

ML: No, this was just ah, a project, you see. And ah, I think that was number two on the list and number one, if I remember right, at that time, was Day's High Landing. And ah -

INT: Now what's Day's High Landing?

ML: Well, that's they was gonna put dam ah, I think the idea was a roll type dam down there. They was tryin' to stabilize ah, get some stabilized water levels without ah, affecting the flow to the Twin Cities, you know.

INT: Mum hum.

ML: So, the only thing they could do is dike the river out, and they'd take water. I suppose they'd ah, they'd a run a tube under the dike there at Federal Dam.

INT: So they'd just kind a send it around -

ML: Well then, they'd flood that big meadow. If you noticed, if you drove north, after you crossed the bridge at Federal Dam, driving north toward Bena, there's a huge meadow off to your right. It's rice paddies.

INT: I wondered. It's snow right now, but -

ML: Yeah, yeah, that was rice paddies, but it used to be a big grass swamp.

INT: Mum hum.

ML: That was about a 400 acre chunk, and then they were gonna put an inverted siphon under the river and do, and flood the area where we built our rice paddies -

INT: Mum hum.

ML: And that was about roughly a three to four hundred acre chunk. And then down by Henderson's, that's Ole's brother, they, he's got a rice farm down the river. Only about three, four miles from the Federal Dam, dam proper.

INT: Mum hum.

ML: Another siphon was to go under the river and they was [indecipherable] it, and I seen the preliminary plan on that. My dad had it and I've looked for it for, for the reservation here. 'Cus we wanted to do that.

INT: Mum hum. You can still see the value of doing something like that even now.

ML: Well, certainly.

INT: Yeah.

ML: But now see, but now they'd have to destroy them rice growers.

INT: Yeah.

ML: I don't know why they ever let them leases. I was a member of the corporation that, that got one of the first leases. And I told, and there was a colored lady that come up from the Corps, our DNR director and other fellow. I met um over here in the cafe, and I told um don't let the lease.

INT: Mum hum.

ML: That wildlife thing was way more important than that rice thing.

INT: Mum.

ML: And I was a mem - I was part owner of the outfit that was asking for the -

INT: For the lease.

ML: I never believed in it from day one.

INT: Huh. So all of the, all of those paddies along the highway are leased on Corps land?

ML: State lease.

INT: I, I was gonna say I didn't think they were Corps land.

ML: State lease, see.

INT: So it's DNR.

ML: Yeah.

INT: Property.

ML: But if they wouldn't of done that, if they'd ever built that, that'd been somethin', that would have really been somethin'.

INT: Mum.

ML: And if they, if, it got lost in the woodwork someplace, I don't know. I can remember my dad had a big map rolled up in his bedroom. He had ah, his lands that he owned and stuff and all the maps and different projects he worked on. He was quite active in this kind of stuff, you know.

INT: Mum hum.

ML: And he had a big, all these rolled up maps in the corner, in a big wastebasket or somethin. And I, we, we, him and I looked at that; I, I've seen it. I went through all my mother's stuff and my dad's stuff after they died, and I can't find it. And I think, but I'm not sure, but I think, somebody from Leech Lake has inquired about it, and the Corps don't seem to have any evidence on it.

INT: Mum, mum. Now, I understand, and I might have not gotten it quite right, so, tell me if that's true. Ah, -

ML: Well, leave me, well I'm thinkin' about somethin'.

INT: Yeah.

ML: When I first went to work here, the chairman then was Dave Menell. And they had a meeting in Grand Rapids, and he told me to make sure I went there. And that was mentioned at that meeting. It was called the Federal Dam Project.

INT: Mum hum.

ML: So maybe you can, you might run into somethin.

INT: Yeah, I might.

ML: And that's when they said it was, I think Day's High Landing Project had priority over the Federal Dam Project.

INT: Ah, huh.

ML: And, and, so it was still bein' talked about and I've, I've worked here, fourteen, fourteen or fifteen years.

INT: So this would have been in the mid-seventies?

ML: Yeah, so it was still bein' talked about fifteen years ago, see, you know.

INT: I'll see if I can find out anything about it.

ML: Yeah, it was called the Federal Dam Project, and all you got to do is visualize the dam and a big pond of water about four hundred acres of water on the north side of the river and an inverted siphon, four hundred acre area on the south side of the river and one more on the north side of the river in about a four mile stretch going down the river. And that's, and that's what it was.

INT: Mum, what, what the plan was.

ML: And you see, if they figured, they figured wild rice for one thing. They was gonna have, they planted in the rice. It was stable; they'd hold that water stable. See, they could control that if they wanted to put some further down, they'd go under the river. They wouldn't affect the volume goin' to St. Paul, see.

INT: They would just kind of have it go through in a different way.

ML: Yup.

INT: More ~

ML: Well, then they could hold it then, see.

INT: A broader stretch, yeah.

ML: We've had -, I don't know. They've held meetings, sportsmen's clubs and stuff and -. One time, the river is down to the rocks, and the next time it's, it's up over the banks, you know.

INT: Mum hum.

ML: And it's just not good for the wildlife, and it's just not good for nothing. We, we used to talk roll dams where they just step that river down. I don't remember the numbers now, but I think it's like a seven-foot drop.

INT: Mum hum.

ML: Between the, ah, Federal Dam and Mud Lake.

INT: Mum hum.

ML: Well, we thought if the could hold, like step it down in three pools, you know.

INT: Instead of having one.

ML: So, you never had less than a couple, two, three feet in the first pool, you know. If they'd let more out, fine; it'd just roll of these rock dams is what we was thinkin', you know. But I don't know. I suppose dollars and cents is the determining factor.

INT: So -

ML: But ah, I don't know, the Indian, the Indian-Corps thing, I don't know. I think there's a little bitterness, you know. I don't know. (pause) They've got graves bein' washed into the lakes, and hell, that, ah, you know, them things are goin' to happen, you know.

INT: I understand you just were having a meeting today about how to, how to help on some of that.

ML: In fact, it was a pre-construction meeting. I met Ruyak over here in the [cafe]. He's a nice guy; he's a good man.

But they do things funny, you know, like that, like that campground in Federal Dam. It should never have been built where it's built. They put all that traffic on the river, and now you hear a little talk, dredge the river, dredge the river, you know. That's crazy, you know. If they'd a left, if they was gonna get in the resort business, they could of just, I had a nice big farm right north of the, town, and there's a nice resort with a beautiful beach that's been for sale forever, out there. If they was gonna get into that business, they should have put that out there, where they didn't have to put all them boats up and down the river. They should have built that on the lake, you know. I don't, I say it's fine. It's a beautiful thing. It's one of the nicest campgrounds, I imagine, in the state, you know. I've never seen one better. But it don't do the town hardly any good. Not much good anyway. And they've just, they've ah plugged that river up so bad, and, of course, then you start gettin' in, in you know we're, we're kind of fre-e-e people around here, you know. You're not used to rubbin' elbows, for one thing. And little mickey mouse rules and regulations when you've lived in a town like 55 years like I have, you know. And been free to come and go, you know. And then you see these, can't park here, you can't, you know, stop the boat here and do this and do that. You'd probably wouldn't be doin' it that way, anyway. But you don't have to have a dozen signs tellin' you, you know.

INT: Yeah, yeah.

ML: And it's ah -

INT: Has a lot of that increased since the recreation went in?

ML: Oh, yeah, it has.

INT: I wanted to ask you how you noticed -

ML: You know, they can do anything. They are like the U.S. Forest Service, Jo. They can do any god darn thing they want to do, you know. Unless you really, want to get, want to take um on. And them guys that's making them rules and regulations, they get their check every month, anyway. And a bunch of us local yokels want to take um on, you take time off your job, you got your own expense and stuff. Forest Service is the same way, they're just totally destroyin' our forest, the Forest Service.

INT: Mum.

ML: They're buildin' roads, their plan is to have a road every half mile through the forest, you know. We ain't got a piece of, anything that looks wild anymore left in this forest. We used to have a beautiful forest, you know. No use tryin' to fight um. They wear you down; you ain't got enough money to fight um, you know. And the Corps did it at Federal Dam and, and I've never pulled any punches about it. I, I just tell them the way I feel. You know, in fact I've, I've got into some pretty heated arguments with some of them, some of the employees and stuff. You know, they made me move a boat trailer one night. A bunch of us was sittin' there, we went down to visit some people. About that far -. They had them Ioway cars and ah, Indiana cars and everything parked in the ditches, all over you know, because of the glut they had there. It was opening weekend. And my trailer stuck out into the road down at the campground about a foot and by golly the, and what do they call them, the park rangers, I had to move it. And I know the guy, you know.

INT: Yeah.

ML: I got mad, you know. I said, you know if they'd went uptown and moved them guys, with them foreign license plates out of the ditches and maybe in places blocking private people from being able to drive out of their driveways and stuff decent, you know. But that's ah, that's the way things seem to go. They should of built that thing across the river, north of town, either bought my farm, which they could of bought real reasonable.

INT: (Laugh) If you do say so, huh?

ML: 327 acres and the swimmin' beach goes with it and everything. This way, they got no swimmin facilities down there, you know, all they got is a muddy old river, you know. And you see, there's goin' to be a bad, bad accident in that river some day. And as a result, you're goin' to get a whole bunch a more phony rules and regulations, and I'll betcha, not too far down the pike, you're gonna see them want to dredge that river. And that's when they're gonna have one hell of a fight with the reservation. 'Cus they already ruined fourteen miles of it between Mud Lake and, and Federal Dam with the dredge, you know.

INT: Mum hum. So there's a real strong feeling around here that people wouldn't want to see -

ML: No way, uh ah.

INT: Any dredging between here and there.

ML: Nope.

INT: Mum, do think, does -

ML: If they want to -. You know, it's been said, we've talked it over many times. If they want to dredge it, fine, you go right ahead and dredge it, but every scoop full of sand that's scooped out of the river, you pick it up, and you haul it someplace else and dump it. Don't make no banks along that river and stuff. And can you imagine what the cost of that would be, you know? Just to get there first that they got in the campground up and down the river, you know, that'd be pretty, that'd be pretty crazy. The river's shallow, you know, it's -

INT: Yes, it's not a deep, deep water draft around here.

ML: No, uh ah. And they've, they've plugged that thing so bad. With ninety campgrounds. Well, you can imagine. Just say, oh, just get the, the land, the place should've been built out of town, so they didn't have to put them people up them mile, mile and a half of river. And I suppose their argument is they didn't have the land. Well, they sure as hell could have got it, you know. 'Cus they didn't build in the greatest -. The area they built just wasn't the greatest, they spent a lot of money with fill and, you know.

INT: Well, I understand, from talking to older Corps people about the, the issue was building on land that they already owned.

ML: Oh, I'm sure, see, but that's a very, when it's wrong, that's a very poor excuse, ain't it, huh? I mean, that's the way a guy on the street looks at it.

INT: Yeah.

ML: You know.

INT: Yeah.

ML: Ah, it's crazy.

INT: I was going to ask you how you, have, if you had noticed and how you had noticed the development of recreational facilities.

ML: I tell you, you, you be at Federal Dam opening day next year.

INT: You know, I've only been up here in the winter time. I have a very different view of things.

ML: Look at that river.

INT: Yeah.

ML: Total chaos. One of these days gonna be a family wiped out on it or somethin'. And then they're gonna wonder why, for that measly forty acres of land that they built that that campground on, why they didn't go spend ah, forty acres probably when they started building that campground, if they'd a done it, they could have parked, out at North Star camp, with a quarter of mile of beautiful sand beach. They probably, and, and filled that and built it like the, with the same dollars that they spent on Federal Dam. And then people would have been right on the lake where they could of went right like this when they got in their boat instead of puttin', you know. You gotta, you gotta troll all the way to the lake anymore, the first week or two.

INT: 'Cus it's such a narrow, and there's so many people?

ML: Oh, when, yeah. And you know, they say, well, people, everybody's got to have their chance. Fine. But that's just like, that's just like goin' down Twin Cities and sayin', well the freeway goes here, and we'll just make it one lane for a mile. That's about what you got. That's about how much sense they got.

INT: Pretty awful, huh?

ML: Yeah.

INT: Yeah. So, ah, we were talking just a minute ago and I just want to, and this is my last set of questions really. Ah, you were just mentioning that ah, you thought there was a little bit of bitterness, if I understood you right, with the Indian community, over the mounds and over the graves and the archaeology. Is that, did I understand you right? Is that -

ML: Yeah, I think that's right; I think there's, yeah. Well, you know, they ah, -

INT: Is there a way to make it better, or -?

ML: Well, I think there, well, I really don't know, Jo. 'Cus I've never, probably wouldn't of hurt for you to talk to ah, Ed Fairbanks or somebody here on that part, who's worked on them bank stabilization projects and stuff. He used to be our DNR director, and now they moved him over. And he took a job on the tribal side as game director or somethin', and we got a new, Joe Day is our new DNR director. Both good men, but ah, Ed has worked on them projects.

INT: So he'd be the person to talk to. If I came back or something?

ML: Yeah, yeah.

INT: So.

ML: Yeah.

INT: It's one of those issues, it's kind of like, um, you know. It's both sensitive and ah, it seems to vary a lot, when I've asked some people about it. It's been, we don't know, we don't have strong feelings about this, but it's clear that other members of the community do. And um, I get the sense from the Corps that there's a real effort to respect, um, the, the Indian customs, and, and when there is a problem that they try to consult.

ML: Well, know, Jo, the same goes with ah, with Forest Service. You know they got all the old treaties. Like if, if, like if I'm not dreaming this reversion clause on the property at Federal Dam that I cited earlier. You got all these old treaties with the Federal Forestry, you know. And everything on the management plans and everything, you know, the reservation's goin' to be included; the reservation's goin' to do this, the reservations, you know; they got to look out for this, they got -. It never comes to be. When their plan goes into effect, if there's somethin' in there that don't suit them, that don't suit the reservation, that's just tough about 90 percent of the time. We just went through it with the Forest Service on ah, on all these roads they're building. They'll build, they'll take where we had an old road that was pretty good. If it was dry, you could use it. You could get back into a certain part of the forest. If it was wet, you walked.

INT: Yeah.

ML: And what did they do? They built a great big wide road, cut and filled, and then they gate it so you can't drive it anymore. Because they ain't got money enough to maintain it. So why did they built it in the first place, you know?

INT: Just for use in the summer time. Is that the -?

ML: Yeah, they call it management. They ain't got any, no sign of management. They don't know what the hell they're doin', you know. But then, the Corps will be the same way and has been, I know, on different things. They, they want to respect the wishes of the reservation and stuff until somethin' the reservation wants to do gets in their way. You might as well be frank about it, you know. And then down comes your, down comes the axe. Then you got a fight. Then you got to make a big stink to either get it straightened out or you lose. One or the two, you know. And then you get a bunch of bad ink in the paper and, and you know, DNR is the same way. Crazy.

INT: Oh, your sense is that the, the tribal community gets the, the brunt of it in, at least the local publicity?

ML: Yeah, sure, yeah.

INT: Mum.

ML: Well, you can imagine how a person down in the metropolitan area would feel if, ah, if the Corps just said we're gonna dredge that river because, we know, we know we can get the water down here, you know, in a just four days quicker, you know just for an example, that is. Well, fine, they're the ones that want the water, right. But we're the ones that live here and we're the ones that don't want to see our end of it destroyed, you know.

INT: Mum hum, mum hum.

ML: That's the long and the short of it, you know.

INT: And that's always, I guess -

ML: And they're great at destroying. Forest Service, Corps, all these guys because they don't put enough effort into research and finding out what the hell is goin' on. They claim they do, but they don't. Ah, they just totally wrecked that, ah, from Federal Dam to Mud Lake. And there's no two ways about it.

INT: Do you think part of it is that they're thinking in technical terms, and the people who live here are kind of thinking in cultural terms about -?

ML: Well, the reason, I guess, for the dredge was, I think the main part of the logging was over then.

INT: Mum hum.

ML: You know.

INT: My im -

ML: Ole's dad run the dredge.

INT: I know that. He told me; he showed me a picture of his father.

ML: Yup.

INT: Running the dredge, and I knew that his father had worked for the Corps. That's why I've been asking other people I talk to around here if there is a family history.

ML: Yeah, you see, so, ah, so I'm sure the big, the main cut, the main, original cut in this country where they drove all these logs to, to Minneapolis or wherever, was over, you know.

INT: Mum hum.

ML: They was probably still drivin' logs.

INT: Mum hum.

ML: But not, not the big rush was over. So why did they built, why did they dredge that river in ah, say 1905, or '10 or '15, so why did they -?

INT: Was that for the Aitkin flood control stuff, 'cus there was, there would of been a -

ML: But why would bother, why would that dredgin' between Mud Lake bother Aitkin?

INT: Yeah, that's ah, it's ah -

ML: You see, it was because -. I always tell the Forestry, whose, you know, I get right in, I get right into it with them, because I've had to fight um all my life, logging and stuff. I said, who through the dart this morning and it landed on the board and said, here's where we're goin' to build a road. That's the system you guys are usin', you know. You got money to spend, so you built the roads. Evidently, I think, you find that with the Corps at times, you know. It's the old system if we don't spend it this year, we won't get funded next year. But that's the only thing that I can send water to the Twin Cities area, instead of six weeks they could have it there, or if it took two months, they could have it there in a month or somethin' you know. It's better control of movement, there. No, but I say it was the Aitkin problem, you know, why in hell didn't they leave us alone here. It wouldn't make no difference how, how much water was here. If they had the, if the had the gut down through Aitkin, right?

INT: Mum hum.

ML: Ain't that what you'd say.

INT: Well, it, it flows off, part of it comes off in that direction, I realize that.

ML: I know, Jo, but if you start from Mud Lake, for instance, with that dam, and left this river all full of ox bows and that nice winding, typical wildlife type of a situation -

INT: Mum hum.

ML: Now, whatever happened here, if it were - and Mud Lake only discharged a little bit, or discharged a whole bunch, and they had it straight at Aitkin, that pool shouldn't affect Aitkin.

INT: Mum hum.

ML: No more than Leech should, you know.

INT: I know that the last dredging was done on the river toward the end of the timber, it certainly was the end of the timber era.

ML: Certainly, yeah.

INT: But ah, I, I understand that around here people that did a lot of, a fair amount of timbering through the war years and then -

ML: Yeah, but there was no drive in that.

INT: It was, it was all going on at

ML: That was all truck and railroad and -

INT: That's what I wondered. That's what I wondered. So that the '30s really were the last years of the rafting.

ML: Oh, yes, it was, I don't think there was any drive in the country in the '30s.

INT: It was, they were over -

ML: Big Fork River. I think was the last drive, and that was like in '34 or '35 or somethin' like that.

INT: So that everything else that went out of here in all those years went out on -

ML: It was either sawed here in the lumber, shipped by rail or, you know.

INT: Well, when I was talking to Irv Seelye yesterday, he was talking about his father's timber operation, and he said that his father went out when they started doing mechanized work. After the war. And I assumed that a lot of people who did timber either got into it as young people as you did -

ML: Yeah.

INT: And got equipment or mechanized equipment or that some of the older people just went out, it's kind like -

ML: Yeah, they changed, I'm tryin' -

INT: It's the way dairy farmers decide to stay in or out with the new machinery requirements, sometimes.

ML: You know, ole Walt Seelye, he was really part of the old landscape, I'll tell ya. Irv's dad.

INT: Yeah.

ML: Yeah.

INT: Well, sir, I've taken a lot of your time this afternoon.

ML: Well, I've kind of enjoyed it.

INT: Well, I enjoyed talking to you, too.

ML: I've got a lot off my chest.

INT: Oh, good. (laugh)

ML: Good, I got some -

MACHINE OFF

U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS, ST. PAUL DISTRICT

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW FORM

Narrator Name: Jim Ruyak

Address: Route 1, Box 267, Remer, MN 56672

Date of Interview: 12-16-87

Place of Interview: Remer office, Corps of Engineers

Name of Interviewer: Jo Blatti

Project Title (if any): Headwaters Interviews, Series II

Narrator Biographical Information:

Full name (including maiden name): James D. Ruyak

Year of Birth: October 16, 1934

Spouse's full name: Joan Fuchs Ruyak

Subjects Discussed:

Main focus of the interview is Mr. Ruyak's work as area manager of Corps' Mississippi Headwaters facilities 1979 to present. Individual topics discussed include quality of life decision to transfer to Headwaters, capability of staff, increased efficiency of operation, development of more accurate visitor figures, Leech Lake concessions, water levels management in wild rice and fish spawning, matters of archaeology and burial mound policy, cooperation among federal, state and tribal organizations in the Headwaters area.

TAPE RECORDING:

No. of Cassettes: 1 No. of Reels & Speed: _____

Length of Interview: 60 minutes

Release form signed (date): 12-16-87

Restrictions (if any): -0-

Comments: Good clear audio quality; tape machine shuts off at several points during interview, but little interruption in flow of narrative.

TRANSCRIPT:

Date completed: January 1988 No. of Pages: 20

Restrictions (if any): -0-

Comments:

TAPE INDEX

Corps/Mississippi Headwaters Interviews, Series II
Interview with Jim Ruyak by Jo Blatti
December 16, 1988
(1 hour)

Tape 1, Side 1

- 0 mins. Family background in Pennsylvania, engineering degree on GI bill
- 1960 went to work for Corps in Pittsburgh District
- Transferred to St. Paul District in 1972, work on LaFarge flood control project 1972-73, chief of construction ca. 1973-79.
- Recounts decision to take in area manager position Headwaters over other possibilities for family reasons
- 7 mins. Quality of life decision to leave Ohio River Valley
- Grade structure higher elsewhere in Corps; on way up to comparable situations elsewhere in system
- 10 mins. Familiarity with Headwaters through construction projects for St. Paul District and family vacations.
- Comparison "rat race" and Remer
- Balance between quiet and preparation time in winter season, May-November visitors
- Competence, capability of staff members who'd made transition from damtender to project manager
- Freedom to spend time on new initiatives: overhauling efficiency; accurizing visitation figures
- 15 mins. Explains old and new methods of visitor counting
- Concessionaire leases at Federal Dam/Leech Lake, importance of close work with local economy
- 20 mins. Usefulness of 20-year concession leases to bank loans and other improvements
- Recent changes at Leech concessions: Waterfront Cafe; purchase of 5th space for expanded Corps visitor parking
- Bridge concession long-standing at Leech, family as source of information about leases over time

25 mins. Wild rice on Leech Lake, explains adjustment of water levels, stages of rice development, how wind and other factors limit effectiveness of Corps discharge

Importance of paddies

Tape 1, Side 2

0 mins. Continued discussion of wild rice paddy operations

Archaeology and native American concerns, coincidence of tribal needs, Corps' current operation

5 mins. Describes walleye stripping operation. Cut Foot Sioux, recent (past 3-4 years) policies concerning water levels at whitefish spawning grounds

Corps' fault that associated with destruction. Example, Corps construction of Ortonville wildlife refuge, Fish and Wildlife Service name on the signs; need to rebuild reputation.

10 mins. No significant change at Remer during his years. Recreation already established. Contracting already established.

Interaction with other agencies important: Forest Service, Leech Lake band, Soil Conservation, DNR, Mississippi Headwaters

15 mins. Everyone outsider with respect native Americans, but joint purpose care for environment and maximum public access

Discusses reservation holdings, constant lawsuits, importance of contemporary co-existence and cooperation

21 mins. Continues philosophical discussion white/Indian land use with interviewer, reiterates importance of contemporary cooperation on matters such as wild rice and whitefish

Burial mounds/current regulations and consultations with Leech Lake and St. Paul District

Compares mounds to St. Paul cemetery, notes importance of respecting the sites

Describes procedures used to "vandal-proof" and mark Gull Lake mound; interpretation at Gull Lake; Winni, Sandy Lake and Lake Andrusia projects in which Corps working with tribal and other officials

Formulation of burial mound policies in consultation with all concerned parties in preparation at Remer office for St. Paul operational manual

U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS, ST. PAUL DISTRICT

ORAL HISTORY AGREEMENT FORM

I, JAMES D. RUYAK, a participant in
an oral history interview recorded on 16-DEC-87,
hereby give and deliver to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, St. Paul
District all the incidents of ownership in that interview, including
copyright, from this time forward.

Signed:

Date 16/DEC/87

Donor

James D. Ruyak

ROUTE 1, Box 267
Address

REMER, MN. 56672

Signed:

Jo Blatti
Interviewer

Transcript
Corps/Mississippi Headwaters Project
Interview with Jim Ruyak by Jo Blatti
December 16, 1987

- INT: Jo Blatti interviewing Jim Ruyak in the Remer Corps offices and the subject of this interview today is the Corps' recreational activities in the Headwaters area.
- INT: Could I ask for just a little bit of background information about how you got to the, you know, what brought you to the Corps of Engineers as a person and your own background?
- JR: Sure. I was born in Pottstown, Pennsylvania. Ah, upon graduation from high school, went into the Army, got the G.I. Bill and went to college in West Virginia. And ah, upon graduation from college was interviewed by the Corps of Engineers, Pittsburgh District, Ohio River Division.
- INT: Now were you an engineer, did you study engineering?
- JR: Studied civil engineering, got a degree in civil engineering, yeah. And in 1960, I went to work with the Pittsburgh District and worked in construction and then later in the district office. And in 1972, transferred to the St. Paul District.
- INT: Is that, I don't know that much about those kinds of internal transfers, is that a common thing to do? Or is that kind of unusual?
- JR: That's not uncommon. In fact, the organization encourages mobility 'cus it gives us a better idea across the country and sort of a uniform policy throughout the organization. So I came into the St. Paul District and worked at the LaFarge Project.
- INT: Now what is that?
- JR: That was to be a flood control reservoir on the Kickapoo River in southwestern Wisconsin, and ah, it never was completed. It's still uncompleted. The dam was 75% complete; all the lands were bought and everything, but it was stopped for environmental reasons. And it's been in a state of limbo since 1973. There have been various bills before Congress to tear it down, but it's still sitting there. So I don't know what's going to happen. Anyway, I was there for one year, and then was made chief of construction branch, moved into the St. Paul District office. Worked as Chief of Construction until 1979, at which time I gave up that job, took a cut in pay and moved up here to the Headwaters Reservoirs.
- INT: Is that an unusual decision among -?

JR: That's a very unusual decision; ah, I can tell you why I made that decision.

INT: I'd love to know.

JR: You would love to know?

INT: Yeah

JR: Ok, my family fell apart. And ah, at the time, I have four children. And when my family fell apart, it tore me up pretty well. And I had these children to take care of, the youngest which was nine, and the oldest was eighteen. And I didn't want to be traveling quite so much as I was in my other position, as Chief of Construction. And this job coincidentally became vacant at this time. And I thought well, it would be ideal, because at the time people were occupying the government dwellings.

INT: So you would -

JR: Right here, so -

INT: Be living and working -

JR: So, I would be living right here, working right here. The school was right across the street. The church was right over there. And ah, it was unusual, in that it was really a step down as far as responsibilities went, and it was also quite a cut in salary. I dropped from a GS13 to a GS11, and it was even more strange because - I was to make my decision whether I wanted this job on a Monday. That Friday afternoon, I received a call from Washington, and ah a past district engineer, Colonel Cox, had called and -. We at the time were building storage facilities for fuel oil and fuels throughout the country, major depots. And I don't want to go into details about it, but, and they were having a lot of problems. And they were going to reorganize and form a department of energy, the United States Government was, to construct fuel depots at four places throughout the world. And he wanted me to head up the construction portion of that agency. And he offered me a salary of somewhere on the order of \$67,000 dollars a year. Super executive salary.

INT: Mum hum.

JR: And he needed to know, he called me on a Friday and he needed to know by Monday whether I would take that job. So that weekend, I went home and sat down with the kids and said, hey kids, here's the choices we have. We can stay here in St. Paul, we can go to Remer, or I can take that job, in which case I would probably have to move to Washington, be traveling a lot and everything. And obviously, I opted to come up here.

INT: Mum hum

JR: And ah, so I turned down a tremendous increase in salary, for a tremendous cut in pay. (laugh) And a tremendous reduction in responsibilities, and ah moved up here, and I've been here ever since. Since then the kids are raised and gone, and I enjoy it.

INT: Mum hum. So do you regret that, or is it a -?

JR: No, I don't regret it. Ah, it was, I think a very smart move, I'm very happy I did it, because ah, I enjoyed the work; I enjoy working with the people. It was very good for the children. There are times now - where I wish I had more responsibility, more things to do. Ah just two years ago, Bill Goetz, Chief of Construction, called me back into the St. Paul District office to act as Chief of Maintenance branch for about a four-month period while they were filling that position. I really enjoyed that. He asked me to stay on, I said no. Sometimes I sit here now, and I wonder why I said no.

INT: Mum hum.

JR: I've had other job offers throughout the country, ah, with more responsibilities, and I've turned them down. Sometimes I sit here and wonder why did I do that? So, yeah, regret, no. Just ah, I suppose everybody in whatever they do every once in a while says, why am I doing this? And that's probably what it is.

INT: It strikes me that a lot of people I've talked to in the interview series have made, I think, what most of us would call a quality of life decision to come up here.

JR: Yeah, really. To come up here, it's a quality of life decision. I think my decision to come to St. Paul District was a quality of life decision. Because I didn't get a promotion or anything, ah, to come up here. And I came here primarily from the Pittsburgh District, from the Ohio River Valley, because I wanted to see clean water rather than the Ohio River. I wanted to see clean air, rather than Wheeling, West Virginia and Steubenville, Ohio, where you sometimes have to turn your headlights on in the middle of the afternoon. And I love to hunt and fish and trap, and my whole family did. And camp, just the outdoors and the lower density of population. And I think a lot of people come up here for that reason. It's a known fact the grade structure in our district is probably lower than the grade structure throughout the Corps.

INT: What does that mean, I don't know -?

JR: That means, like for a comparable position, this position that I'm in right now, I'm what's called a GS11. It would probably be a GS12 or maybe even a GS13 in another district somewhere. That's not because, I don't think, it's because I have less work to do; it's just characteristic of this district that our grades appear to be a step lower. Maybe because people like to be here. 'Cus of the quality life, so you pay a price for being here.

INT: Mum, mum

JR: I would hate to think that we didn't do our part. (laugh)

INT: Yeah, I just, from the outside looking in, it would occur to me to wonder why the structure wouldn't be a little higher because people with good credentials had made the decision to come up?

JR: I don't know. I, ah, I don't know. I hope it will work itself out in the future. I think it's beginning to now, because the Chief of our division Bill Goetz, Chief of Construction Operations Division, just within the last year, ah, got an increase to, I think, a GS15, which makes him now comparable with his counterparts throughout the country. So it's getting there.

INT: So maybe, but your point is that it's not a hardship post, as far as the people who are doing it.

JR: No, no, there -

INT: So there's no reason to sweeten the deal for -

JR: No. In fact, there are times when I think we should be paying the government for being here. (Laugh)

JR: You can strike from this question. (laugh)

INT: You should be aware that I pull the tabs, so it is not possible to erase these tapes once they are made. Now what did you find when you got up here?

JR: Up here. Up here in Remer?

INT: Yeah, into Remer. Yeah, what were your first impressions of the Headwaters and of -?

JR: Well, Remer was not totally foreign to me, because in my position as Chief of Construction, we had been doing some constructing up in this area. The maintenance buildings, the comfort stations, sewage treatment plants, and I'd spent time up here on occasion with construction contractors. I had also camped up here. I was very aware of the area obviously, because it's written up in the magazines, as a great vacation spot, etc.

When I got up here, I guess I found just what I expected. A nice rather quiet sedentary type of life for me. Possibly for me because I was accustomed to ah, being more in the mainstream, more in the rat race kind of in my other job. So when I took this job, it presented no major challenge whatsoever; no stress involved with the job and just a real neat balance. 'Cus we have our people and most of our work during, oh, May through November period of the year. And then a sedentary type of life November through May, where we can catch up and do the things necessary to have an ongoing program while the tourists are here.

So, ah, the job was good; the life was good. It was quiet; the area was clean. I ran into people who were very capable and competent. The managers, now I am speaking about. The ah, Ed Sundes, and Marty Erharts and Walt Hermerdings and people like that, that really knew what they were doing. You had broached this, in some of the other work you'd done, 'cus I read it. But they'd made that transition from dam tender to more like project manager, and they had made that transition very well. So, I had a bunch of people that really knew what they were doing. And I could spend my time trying to, mum, start new initiatives, go different directions, try different things, solve their problems that were unsolvable. I've had a nice job, really, very easy, thank goodness, 'cus of the people I'm surrounded by.

INT: Yeah. What kinds of things did you get involved in?

JR: Oh, ah, we did some major overhauling with respect to efficiency of the organization, I think. Probably, that was our largest thrust. Ahm, when I came up here, the organization numbered close to 60 or 70 people.

INT: That would be at all of the dam sites.

JR: Yes, and I'm talking through the season, during the May through November time of the year. We've reduced that to 37. To be able to do that we had to make other changes. We revised our shift schedules, ah, the types of work in patrolling we do at the sites.

INT: Didn't you contract out some then?

JR: We contracted out some of the work, and got it out into the private sector. Ah, that's not only saved people but that saved money also. It's an enormous savings because of contracting. Ah, so we did a lot of work along the lines of efficiency. We spent a lot of time trying to accurize our visitation numbers. When I came up here our annual visitation was being recorded at somewhere in the area of 1.1 million visitors a year. I think within about two years, I had reduced that by close to 60%, simply because of the inaccuracy of our accounting methods. And then I spent a considerable amount of time explaining why.

INT: What was the earlier method? It was kind of every point of contact or -?

JR: No. The earlier method were inaccurate traffic counters. We now have magnetic inducting loops that are buried in asphalt roadways, that count a vehicle once. That don't count a person, that don't count a bicycle. At the time, we had the pneumatic tubes so when you cross

INT: Oh, so anything that went across was counted.

JR: So, a kid could stand there and stomp his foot six times and that would be six visitors. That accounted, probably, for about a 20

to 25 percent reduction in numbers. Ahm, we were not counting non-recreation vehicles or government vehicles. Ah, they also counted for another 20 to 30 percent reduction in numbers.

INT: Every time a maintenance crew went into an area or something like that?

JR: Sure. And in and out, a government vehicle goes in and out many many times. You are familiar with Leech Lake.

INT: Yes.

JR: We had a traffic counter across the road where the concessions are. Where the concessionaires -

INT: So, a lot of those people weren't campers, yeah.

JR: Sure. So, it was that type of thing. We ran some surveys to find out number of people per car, and that accounted for some reductions. So we, I think, I don't think, I know that we accurized our visitation numbers. And then like I said, spent some time explaining that away. You know, why the drop from here to here; what happened?

INT: Your count now would be what - 600,000, 800,000 people per -?

JR: Mum hum. No, about 6, yeah.

INT: Per season?

JR: Per season.

INT: For all of the campgrounds that the Corps maintains.

JR: Yeah, yeah.

INT: When, then that -, the attempt there is to, to kind of tie that number to the campground and to the day use, not to get too balled up in the concessions, or is that possible?

JR: Right, no. That's that's very true. Except ah -. Well, we have no method at the present for taking the concession number out of that, but that doesn't bother us, because in our way of thinking they're day users also.

INT: Yeah, yeah.

JR: So that doesn't bother us. So we accurized our numbers. Ah, hopefully, we became more efficient. I know we have, 'cus we've reduced our budget. And reduced our -

INT: Is there kind of a strong feeling here or within the Corps generally that some kind of funds should be spent on the local economy? Does that have something -?

JR: I, yeah

INT: To do with the local economy. Does that have something to do with the local contracting?

JR: Yeah, I have that feeling. Probably because of my number of years with the Corps and number years, maybe, working at projects in construction. I have attended a lot of public meetings, have participated in a lot of public meetings. And ah, one of the things we always preached, that if we have a project or if we are located in the area, we will do a lot to boost the local economy. So it's very important to me that the Corps of Engineers, if it is located in this area, that we try to do as much business as is possible with the private sector in the area to boost the local economy. And also to try to do as much business as is possible with the local businessmen. And we do that as much as possible.

INT: I was really interested, I talked to Lee Staley in Federal Dam the other day about his concession business, the one he bought from Wescotts. And he said that the concessionaires has recently signed 20-year leases with the Corps at Federal Dam.

JR: Mum hum.

INT: And that surprised me, that struck -, that's a big increase from five to twenty years. Is that common?

JR: No, that's something I did when I came up here. Ah, I think we have a responsibility to concessionaires, also, to make as favorable an economic climate as possible. So I had a meeting with them shortly after I came up, and ah, I asked the question how they were doing, what I could do to help them, you know, the same old things that Uncle Sam always asks. And one of the suggestions was that it would be nice if they had 20-year leases, because then they could get bank loans to improve their properties. They were two-year leases at the time, and the banks simply would not loan them money on a two-year lease, because there is no stability involved.

INT: Mum hum.

JR: So I did, I changed the lease to 20 years, so that they could get money to put into their facility to develop 'em.

INT: Ah, huh. So it was two and then five and then -

JR: It was two, and then five, and then twenty.

INT: I see. So for many years the concessionaires had been signing two-year leases.

JR: Yeah, yeah.

INT: I see, that's very interesting.

JR: And I think that helped considerably. Ah, I know it has, because I've seen improvements in the area.

INT: It's very shipshape looking in terms of a winter-time visit.

JR: Yeah, yeah. We're doing more right now. What has happened since, I don't know, especially in the last 10 years. Prices have escalated to the point where an average price for a launch trip now per person is somewhere on the order of 16 or 18 dollars, for four hours. That appears to be too much for somebody to pay to fish.

INT: Mum hum. It is a lot money; I've found myself thinking about that.

JR: Yeah, it just doesn't work in the head. Ah, as a result of that, the business has decreased significantly. And it doesn't seem as though there is really enough business for five concessionaires. So what I've been trying to do is reduce the number. And, ah, when Squires sold out several years ago, Tonga bought Squires. And I hope through discussions with Merlin Tonga, he decided not to make another launch service and built the waterfront cafe, which was a needed facility there, that little restaurant. We just, do I have to stop now?
[Machine switched off momentarily.]

INT: No, no (laugh). I should make a note the machine has been a little porky this trip, and so I just turn it back on when it does that.

JR: Ok. We just recently completed the purchase of the end concessionaire. Machart sold it to Mert Lego and company, and then we purchased it from Mert Lego.

INT: So, when I spoke to Mr. Lego, he said that they had just moved the house off, or the building off, to make a cabin out of it.

JR: Yeah, yeah.

INT: And that you're going to use the space for additional parking?

JR: Yeah, yeah. We need a larger parking for the boat ramp that is there, and I hope someday to put a swimming beach in there for people. And that will also cut the launch services down to three.

INT: Mum hum.

JR: Which is very, very good. Ah, we'll see if there is enough business for three launch services. I think there will be.

INT: What would, let me ask one question. When I went to poke around and look at the concession area the other day, there is a cabin or an office with Tonga's name on it, as well as the Waterfront Cafe.

JR: Yes.

INT: So they both run a livery service, and they also have the cafe?

JR: Yes, yes. He's got two of the leases. There are five leases; there are government lots for 45 hundredths of an acre that can be operated for a variety of services. One of which is launching, or restaurant services or bait, gas and the like, all public services of those types of things.

INT: Now has the fifth lease just become null?

JR: Yeap.

INT: So there are really only four leases now?

JR: Yep.

INT: Have there, I mean I understand just from looking at old records that there have, and talking to people there have been more or less been five concessions there traditionally for a long time. Is there some kind of, you know, does this go, do you know how far this goes back in terms of your own records?

JR: No. Ah, I would imagine it's, why I know it's in the records. I don't know. Warren Bridge will know if you ask him. He's one of the first concessionaires in the area, and he tells me that he's got about 45 years up there. So about 45 years, which say that there are five concessions up in that area somewhere around the early to mid '40s and since that time.

INT: Well, in talking to Wes Walters it seems like they were there when he started taking responsibility for the Headwaters in the '30s. Ahm, what I'm trying and I don't if I can do it -

JR: Sure they were because Warren's dad Harold -

INT: Right. Came up in the '30s.

JR: Sure and he ran Bridges Launch Service, initially.

INT: Yeah, yeah, yeah. And the link I'm trying to make, and I may not be able to make it through oral history, it may have to come -. But when you look at old, old stuff, there have obviously been fish guides services on Leech Lake dating to about the turn of the century. And there are old pamphlets in the Minnesota Historical Society for these services that were advertised mainly for railroad people. People who came, you know, actually fairly well-off tourists, probably, who would have come up on the railroad.

JR: I remember seeing the pictures on the back of the train with the stringers, of walleyes, sure, you bet.

INT: That's right, that's right. And so I'm just, and I'm, you know, memory may not stretch that far. I'm trying to see how far back the people that I can talk to in this area remember, ah, the fish guide services. And the 30's may be as far back as we can get. But maybe there are ways to find out from the Bridges who was there before they were, who did they buy from or what was it like?

JR: Yeah, the Bridge or the Bridges Launch Service is the first one I remember being talked about. So if you're going to find out anything earlier than that you're gonna have to talk to somebody -.

INT: Yeah, right, that his memory is -

JR: Much older than I am.

INT: Yeah, yeah. The other thing that I wanted to ask, I'm kind of asking everybody that I talk to on the Corps staff about wild rice and the extent to which your work in the area brings you into wild rice issues and water management and the Native American community at Leech Lake.

JR: Wild rice obviously is a major economic factor in this area. Leech Lake is probably the largest producer of the crop of wild rice of all the lakes in the area. So it's very important to the Native American community that they maximize wild rice crop. Ah, there are many, many factors that influenced the wild rice crop, water levels, wind, disease and the like. We can somewhat control water levels. We the Corps, in the last five years since I've been here, we've attempted to tailor our operating plan on Leech Lake to maximize that wild rice crop. And the way that's done is by trying to maintain stable water levels from about the 15th of May through the end of June. During this period, wild rice grows, and then it gets into a stage called the floating leaf stage where the plant develops leaves and the leaves lay on the water. If you raise water levels during this period, the leaves -

INT: They can't stretch, yeah.

JR: Buoy up the stem, they stretch the roots and tear the plant out. So you try to maintain a stable water level during that period, and then try to maintain a rather stable water level through August. And then try to drop the water level in August, so that during the harvest season a lot of the plant is sticking above the canoe so that it can be bent over and the grain harvested. We try do that. On occasion, we have been successful. However, our dams are not large enough to allow us to really regulate water levels that closely on a lake as large as Leech. So we've also failed at times. And I hesitate making too great a promises to anybody. I always try to couch that, and say we will try, but

I don't guarantee it. What has also happened in the last five or six or seven years is the wind has played a large part, and it will. If the wind comes up very strong during the floating leaf stage, or even later, there's ever high water period or even no high water periods and large wind, it can take these rice beds and just tear them loose, just from rocking back and forth. So we've tried, um, to maximize the wild rice crop. I can't really say whether we have or have not done any good. I think probably a much larger factor in the economic value of the wild rice crop is not so much our dams as the paddies.

INT: Mum hum.

JR: And possibly not so much the paddies in this state as maybe now, I understand, the paddies in California.

Side Two - Tape 1

INT: I got, in speaking with Mert Lego, I also got an analysis which suggested that, that the paddy rice and having enough space to do a good-sized paddy was now a very important issue and how, you know, how, you could do wild rice, how big a, a -

JR: Crop.

INT: An area you could put in. So, now what about other relationships with Leech Lake and with the tribal community? Archaeology, um, the local memory of history around here, how does that kind of thing show up in your work?

JR: Well, I think our relationship with the Native Americans has to be very, very close, because we are on a reservation. Our reservoir, Leech Lake and Winni, are on the Leech Lake Reservation. I don't know, I feel responsibility to them, too. While I've got a responsibility to operate those reservoirs for my purposes, I also have to tailor my purposes to meet their needs as much as possible. So whenever we do anything, any operations, I talk to them. I will go meet with them even if I don't have a specific reason, just to sit down with Hartley White, or ah, the head of the Natural Resource Department who used to be Ed Fairbanks, now is Joe Day, and just keep them tuned into what we are doing. We try to employ Native Americans on our projects during the summer, whenever possible. If there are any needs that they express, they're made known and we try as much as possible to meet them. And their needs coincide with the current purposes for which the Headwaters project is operated. The Headwaters project was initially authorized for purposes of navigation. Low flow augmentation. Have you been through this exercise -?

INT: Oh, yeah. I know that it was originally for the flour mills of Minneapolis and timbering and -

JR: Sure. Store the water and release it during the summer when there is no water. That's since gone by the wayside, with the lock and dam system that was constructed in the '30s. And while the purposes have not been changed congressionally, we now operate these reservoirs more for recreation, fish and wildlife enhancement, flood control, pollution abatement, that type of thing. These are also concerns of the Native American community in the area. So if I'm operating these for fish and wildlife enhancement for recreation, i.e. tourism, for water quality, those purposes coincide rather deeply with what the Native Americans want.

INT: Do you find that the Corps defines those issues the same way?

JR: Sure.

INT: That the tribe does.

JR: Sure, you bet. Yeah. And we even, oh, we get into specifics, ah, we've tailored the operating plan on Lake Winnibigosh to increase or maximize what's called the walleyed stripping operation. Are you familiar with that?

INT: I don't know what the stripping part means.

JR: The Department of Natural Resources has certain areas up here where in the spring, latter part of April every year, they put out nets, capture female walleyes, strip the eggs out of them, incubate the eggs and then use those fingerlings to stock lakes with walleyes.

INT: So, it's kind of a modified fish hatchery, kind of.

JR: Yeah, yeah. Um, the Leech Lake tribe now has their hatchery, also. So they are doing the same thing, and they're also have a stocking program going on. We've modified our operating plan on Winni to maximize that stripping operation. Ah, whitefish -

INT: Can I just go back and ask, I mean, how do you actually, I mean you actually, somebody has to sit there and squeeze all those fish, right?

JR: Sure.

INT: So it must be very labor-intensive?

JR: It is.

INT: Where do you get people to do that, kids?

JR: Department of Natural Resources does it

INT: Uh huh.

JR: They hire their fisheries people, plus they supplement their crews with other people at the time. Labor intensive, ah (pause) I don't know, Cut Foot Sioux up on the northwest side of Lake Winnibigosh is one area where the stripping operation is conducted, and I have probably seen 15 people there at any one time. So it is, and it isn't intensive. It's a short duration type thing. It's maybe a two-week type operation, and it's done.

INT: Ok.

JR: Ah, what I was going to say before, whitefish is also a very important fish up in this area. Whitefish are netted.

INT: Mum hum.

JR: Whitefish are one of the few fish that spawn in the fall, in November, which is also about the time we're drawing our reservoirs down to get ready for our winter pull. We can't draw our reservoirs down too fast, or we -

INT: Beach a lot of -

JR: Take the whitefish spawning beds out of the water, which was no good, which we didn't really realize until about four or five years ago. So we have modified our reservoir operations now to slow down our draw down, so that the wal-, or the whitefish, can get spawned and get off the spawning beds before we take water down too low. So we're doing little things like that within that broad term, "fish and wildlife enhancement," that goes along very, very nicely with exactly what the Native Americans want up in the area.

INT: The thing that I, you know, kind of thought about when you were telling me just about the whitefish thing, was to remember the snail darter -

JR: Mum hum.

INT: And to think the Corps has developed over the years highly selective, but sometimes a very bad name in terms of its, its appreciation for -

JR: Yeah, yeah. That's our own fault, Jo. Ah, I hope we've got a campaign going on to do away with that now. But if you just think a little bit, I know, I can see it, whenever you have seen the Corps of Engineers name, it has been on a large concrete structure or a large earthen structure or else a concrete channel line stringing through a town, or something destructive to the natural environment like that. You have never seen a Corps sign on a nice wildlife refuge like down on at Big Stone-Whetstone, down in your part of the state, Ortonville.

INT: Mum hum.

JR: We built that. We built that dam, created that beautiful refuge and turned it over to the Fish and Wildlife Service. Our name and sign remains on the dam, but the fish and wildlife signs remain on the refuge.

INT: Mum hum.

JR: Ah, down along the upper Mississippi River, our names are on the locks and dams, but the Fish and Wildlife Service signs are all along the refuges and management areas, and wetlands. If you go out in other states where we have purchased lands to operate reservoirs -
[Machine switches off momentarily]

INT: You were saying in other states.

JR: Yeah, North Dakota, ah, South Dakota, and I imagine throughout the country. We purchase lands, flowage easement lands, the right to flood in case we have to raise the reservoirs, but most of the time they're not flooded, so they turn into real neat game management areas. We turn these over to states for management, or the Fish and Wildlife Service. Our names don't go on those things. The only place you see our name is on the dam.

INT: On the structure, so you're -

JR: We created that. So we have built our reputation, and I hope now we're trying to turn that around. I hope in the not too distant future you'll see our name together with the Fish and Wildlife Service on the upper Mississippi and out at Orwell and out at Big Stone and throughout the rest of the world, I hope. 'Cus we have done a lot to ah, help the environment.

INT: If had to um, ah ask you to, to say what's the biggest change that you've seen in the time that you've been in Remer, what would it be?

JR: I don't think we have had any significant changes while I have been here. When I came here, recreation was already -

INT: It was established.

JR: Part of the project, yes. And all we have done is modified, revised, changed, initiated new programs, but we're still performing recreational activities. Um, Contracting. We had done piecemeal contract before, we're still doing piecemeal contracting. Our entire operation is not contracted. Ah, presumably before ah, other managers have tried, I hope, to use the least number of folks to do the job, we're doing the same thing.

Ah, I know one thing that I've tried to do, but I would hope other managers have tried to do it, too. I try to interact a lot with other agencies. I think it's very, very necessary. We have the Forest Service in the area, and we have the Department of

Natural Resources in the area, and we have the Soil Conservation Service in the area, and we have the Leech Lake Band, and further north the Red Lake Band in the area. And I think it's very important that we all meet and know what each other is doing. So we don't duplicate efforts, and so we provide the best service to the public. And I think the only way we can do that is by coordinating with each other.

INT: And so those are kind the actors in the sense of your -

JR: Yeah, yeah. And I think they have been for a long time. I don't know any new actors, other than the Mississippi Headwaters Board. That was formed back here just about five or six years ago. But beyond that the Department of Natural Resources has been here; the Forest Service has been here, and the Native Americans have been here and the SCS has been here, Soil Conservation Service.

INT: Do you think that, you know, just in your experience, are, I mean, all the places that you've named, except, except the Indian bands, are kind of outsiders coming into this area in a way. I don't mean they're outsiders, I mean, they are large federal or state bodies. Do you, are you seen that way in this community, or is it a different kind of relationship.

JR: I don't feel that way. I think everybody in this area is an outsider with respect to the Native Americans, including individual residents. I think we're all looked on that way. I think, I'm not normally in favor of big government. I, I don't want to see the government get too large, too powerful. But I think one of the beauties of this area is the amount of public land available that allows people to do more and do it more freely. I think that that's possible because of agencies such as the Corps of Engineers and the Forest Service and the Department of Natural Resources and the Leech Lake Band. 'Cus I think we all have a similar charge, and that is to take care of the environment and yet allow a maximum use by the public. And I think that is very, very important, and that is very neat up here, that you can literally go in any direction and not run into fences and no trespassing signs and, and billboards with a whole bunch of rules on them, do's and don'ts. So I think we all, we're probably all outsiders with exception of the Native Americans, but I think we all have a similar purpose in mind. We all want to preserve what's here, and yet we all want to allow maximum use by the public and that makes us a rather close knit group, you know -

INT: Right.

JR: Because deep down we all have, like I said, that same charge and we are all thinking along the same lines.

INT: The question that occurs to me in a way is not to ask you, it's to ask somebody like Hartley White, but you're the person before me, so let me see if you've encountered this. Um, it is to, you know, I'm thinking as you talk about some of things I read in

preparation for coming up here. One of which was that a surprising amount of the original Leech Lake Reservation doesn't exist anymore, I mean, it's, it's much smaller than the original reservation, and it's, it's, I almost want to say five percent which seems outrageous but I, that's the figure I remember. Ah, of the original holding, is what the band now has.

JR: I don't know that.

INT: Ah, I wonder if people know it here, if it's part of your -

JR: No, I don't think that's part of our knowledge or our concern. I -

INT: And, that, I wondered if it, if there's um. And my figure has to be checked, but I remember being just astonished at looking -

JR: Mum.

INT: At Minnesota Indian reservations, and that this one was so little of what had originally been awarded. And all of that land must have over the years gone into timber rights, into other public land uses, I assume, with the Forest Service and the Corps and other people.

JR: It wasn't broken up into several reservations by any chance. You know we have the White Earth Reservation to the west.

INT: No, they're all listed.

JR: Ok, ok. No. I wasn't aware of that, Jo. I ah -

INT: And I just wondered if that knowledge ever showed up or that historical memory, really, showed up in your dealings with the community?

JR: No. Ah, I know that there are constantly lawsuits going on over who is entitled to what in the way of lands, and I would imagine that gets back to what you are speaking about.

INT: Mum hum.

JR: But I have no intimate knowledge of what the original holdings were. I guess I really don't look at it that way. I would choose to rather look at it that, here we are, and it is absolutely necessary that we co-exist. Ah, I'm a professional in my field of water resource development, and I've got a project here. And you are Native Americans, and this is your home and you've got concerns. And the Forest Service have a large forest out there that they're mandated to take care of, and the Department of Natural Resources has a state responsibility for taking care of these natural resources. So let's all get together and create the best co-existence atmosphere possible. And I tend to want to forget who belonged or who owned what, when, because I don't think that is important in our society today. Because too much of what was originally owned and

everything is always being changed, and I hope being used for the best purpose. So I don't think we are unique in Northern Minnesota.

If, if the Native Americans had lands that have since been taken away, or left them for whatever reason, I don't know how important that is. Because other lands have been taken from people. Ah, you know, highways have been built; railroads have been built; cities have been built and somebody, some farmer or someone owned that land at one time and that was either purchased in a friendly manner or condemned so that those facilities could be built so that we could exist. That's progress. So possibly in that same vein, that's what's happened up here. It's happened ah, maybe in an atmosphere of friendliness. Maybe that's what's the Native Americans wanted. Probably so, because there are a lot of white folks living on the reservation. They allow this; they encourage tourism. I just, I tend to look at it more in, I would choose to look at it in that friendly type of circle where, here we are all together and why should we fight? 'Cus we all really have the same purpose in mind. And why don't we get together and do our jobs, 'cus we can do them well if we cooperate. I would hope everybody else looks at it that way, too, and that's the feeling I get when I sit down with people.

INT: I think in terms of historical memory, it must be a very delicate balance in this part of the country between, remembering some things, perhaps such as that the Native Americans don't have the same concept, or did not before Western contact, have the same concept of land ownership that we do.

JR: Mum, oh yeah.

INT: Which would be the, you know the -

JR: Yeah.

INT: The issue, I mean your example's very good in terms of historical, but there's one basic difference, which is Europeans assume that you can own land -

JR: Mum hum.

INT: And North Americans of European extraction assume that you can own land. I just mention that it occurs to me, not because I want to argue with you. But there is a historical, a cultural difference, or was at the point of contact.

JR: Yeah, I ah. I just see no difference, ah, in land holdings or the desire to hold land here in northern Minnesota versus the rest of the world. And ah, just to reiterate again, throughout the world, we notoriously use land for what we consider to be the best purpose. And we get that land by whatever means it takes to get that land. And I think, if that has happened up here, I don't know that it has. Ah, only on occasion, ah, I guess we will be reminded, you know, that there was a time that this was

all our land. And I will not refute that claim. Sure, you know there probably was a time that it was somebody else's, monkeys or whoever before that, I don't know.

But it just seems like an academic argument to sit down and argue about things like that that we're not going to change overnight, or even in our time. It may be changed in historical times, hundreds of years or something, when these matters are settled in court. But we can sit down at this table and decide to change an operating plan to maximize whitefish spawning. We can decide to sit down at this table and change an operating plan to maximize wild rice crops. So there are real things that we can do that benefit our current society. So why should we waste time arguing about these academic things that we're not going to decide?

INT: Would it be fair to say that for you, the controlling kind of issues are how to behave here and now, what the possibilities are, and -

JR: And try to preserve for the future. To make sure that we preserve this heritage, yeah. You bet, that's very important to me.

INT: And perhaps the public character somewhat to the land up here?

JR: Yes, yeah, yeah.

INT: One last question. It's slightly related. It has to do with archaeological matters with the Indians groups in the area and, ah, burial mounds and that kind of cultural and religious issue, on the Corps holdings. What, what is the status of the Corps', this office's, kind of, what is the issues there, is it an issue? I mean, I know that there are Indians ah, there were the sites of Indian villages certainly around Leech and Winni, and also around Sandy, in terms of the memories of people that I've spoken to in the series and the archaeological reports. To what extent are those, those remains in need of care or a point of conversation among yourselves and the Leech Lake Band?

JR: It's a very important issue. Um, there's no question but that northern Minnesota is archaeological significant, especially with respect to Native Americans. Um, we have regulations that require us, the Corps, to perform cultural resource investigations anywhere on any of our projects throughout the world prior to doing any construction. We have done that. Dave Berwick knows more about that than I do, although I'm aware of a lot of the investigations that have taken place up here.

We also have burial mounds on our project. We use those in two ways, with the consent of the Native Americans. Ah, we understand the significance of the burial mounds; they're sacred the same as our cemeteries are sacred. Cemeteries are cemeteries to me. Again, I don't, burial mounds, cemeteries, it's people buried there. Um, I don't want to take a bulldozer into a

graveyard down in the Twin Cities and tear it up any more than I want to tear up an Indian burial mound up here. It just, they're due a certain amount of respect. We've used them for interpretation. We have an interpretive trail down at our Gull Lake project, where we have some nine or ten burial mounds that have a little wooden post on them with a number on them. And we have a little pamphlet that explains what this is, so that people can walk through and understand what an Indian burial mound is and understand some of the history associated with it. We have a um, archaeologically significant site at Gull Lake where the Gull River leaves Gull Lake. About four years ago, I built a project out there. Ah, the project consisted of a beach, a day use area which was picnic tables, fireplace grills, parking lot, ah, oh launching ramp, fish cleaning station, privy with a change house and light. Prior to doing any of that construction, I overlaid the whole area first with about a two-inch marker bed of light sand and then with about six inches of top-soil. So all we did, in essence, was vandalproof -

INT: Mum.

JR: The archaeological site and preserved it. And we constructed on top of it. There are ways of working like that. We have an Indian burial mound up at Winni dam, and I hope, possibly this coming year we're going to build a day use area up there. And I intend to fence that off and put a sign up, an interpretive sign, so that people can come up again, look, see what a burial mound is and know what that term means.

We also protect them. Ah, four years ago, we had erosion over on Sandy Lake where a burial ground was eroding over on the north shore, and we went in the wintertime and placed fill and restored the bank and seeded it. I was at a preconstruction conference yesterday afternoon to do a similar project up at Lake Andrusia. It's an Indian burial ground that's eroding because of the Mississippi River flow; we're going to go in and place the fill and riprap to restore and protect that.

INT: Where is Lake Andrusia?

JR: Lake Andrusia is upstream of Cass Lake and Cass Lake is upstream of Lake Winnibigosh. They're all on the Mississippi River.

INT: Mum hum.

JR: We ah, got into that project with the Forest Service, Soil Water Conservation Service. There were a bunch of agencies interested in protecting that burial ground, and I hope through the efforts of all those, ultimately, it came out as a Corps project. But I certainly do not feel the Corps deserves all the whatever you want to give for it, because we were just one of the elements working there. And we're going to do the work, now, through our contractor. So, I don't know if I've answered your question. They are here, the area is archaeologically significant; we are very aware of it; we don't do anything without doing cultural resource investigations.

Um, we are now in the process, this winter, I've spoken to Christy Cain, who is the State Archaeologist, and Earl Sargeant, who is the Indian coordinator for Indian burial mounds in northern Minnesota, and, hopefully, with their help, we will develop a burial mound policy for the St. Paul District. We will develop that here in the Headwaters; I'll turn it over to Dave Berwick and he will put the finishing touches on it. And my hope is that that policy will tell us what we can and cannot do in the future, and how we should treat these. And that will become part of our operational manual for each one of these projects.

INT: Ok.

U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS, ST. PAUL DISTRICT

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW FORM

Narrator Name: Irving L. Seelye

Address: P. O. Box 011, Bena, MN 56626

Date of Interview: 12-14-87

Place of Interview: Winnibigoshish Dam

Name of Interviewer: Jo Blatti

Project Title (if any): Headwaters interview series II

Narrator Biographical Information:

Full name (including maiden name): Irving L. Seelye

Year of Birth: 1927

Spouse's full name: Grace Seelye (divorced)

Subjects Discussed:

Mr. Seelye discusses career with Corps in Headwaters area, 1954-1987; he began as seasonal worker at Leech, progressed to permanent status there and then moved to Winni as damtender, 1959-1987.

Subjects discussed include family in Bena and environs, Forest Service and private resorts in the area, responsibilities for Red Lake and Knutson dams; changes in dam-tending over the years; recreation facilities at Winni starting in 1971; railroad service in earlier days; the Remer office; other Corps personnel in his years in the area; the dam-tender's dwelling and officers quarters at Winni; family life at Winni; family heritage as quarter-breed Chippewa.

TAPE RECORDING:

No. of Cassettes: 2 No. of Reels & Speed: _____

Length of Interview: 1 1/2 hours

Release form signed (date): 12-14-87

Restrictions (if any): -0-

Comments: Mr. Seelye moves away from the microphone a lot, has a low voice.

TRANSCRIPT:

Date completed: February 1988 No. of Pages: 30

Restrictions (if any): -0-

Comments:

TAPE INDEX
Corps/Mississippi Headwaters Interviews, Series II
Interview with Irv Seelye by Jo Blatti
December 14, 1987
(1 hour, 30 minutes)

Tape 1, side 1

- 0 min. Seelye born and raised in Bena, father worked parttime Department for Agriculture (Forestry Service) and was and old-time logger.
- Seelye's career with Corps: seasonal worker ca. 1954, permanent appointment at Leech followed by Winni appointment
- 5 mins. Discusses damtender's dwelling at Winni, compares favorably with other local residences, describes arrangements with Corps.
- 10 mins. Moved out to build own house in Bena, preparation for retirement.
- Notes ideas under discussion for now-empty dwelling.
- Officers quarters at Winni, moved off before his family arrived in 1959, describes logbook entries he's read concerning the quarters.
- 16 mins. Use of local motels by visiting St. Paul staff in Seelye's time.
- Electrification of Winni dam ca. 1965, compares manual stop log to current arrangements.
- Describes inspection responsibilities for other area dams, replacement of manual labor dam-tending with recreational responsibilities.
- 20 mins. Dealing with campers, office work.
- How Corps used to do all its work, "in-house", no more laborers, replaced with contractors.
- Describes current personnel and work arrangements at Winni, gage-reading schedules.
- 27 mins. Monthly Red Lake inspections, problem of vandalism.

Tape 1, side 2

- 0 min. First recreation facilities at Winni, circa 1971.

Describes Forest Service campground and private resorts immediately surrounding Winni Dam.

- 5 mins. Winni campers as older crowd, longterm visitors, quiet campground.

Pre-camping picnics in the area.

Longtime presence private resorts and Forest Service campgrounds in area.

- 10 mins. Vandalism at Plug Hat Point, Red Lake.

Describes Red Lake facility, sovereign reservation, problems encountered there.

- 15 mins. Early years with Corps, help of "old-timers" such as Henry Dart and Owen Emsweiler.

Notes changes in dam-tending personnel over time, retirements, another batch.

- 20 mins. On Remer office, though different organizationally not sure makes much difference in his operation.

Tape 2, side 1

- 0 min. Describes survey of reservoir summer homes and resorts done for von Lorenz when (Seelye) first at Winni.

Tourist presence when Seelye growing up in Bena, uncle's fishing livery business.

Train service in the area during Seelye's boyhood.

- 8 mins. The Seelye children's schooling and bus arrangements - while growing up at Winni Dam.

Family get-togethers at damtender's dwelling.

Liked living at work until recreation came in, hard to cook outside, kids couldn't get on swings.

- 14 mins. Saved travel costs to live at dam early on.

Security problems after he moved out.

Friends at neighboring resorts.

Water level questions always.

His experience wild ricing on Leech with family.

Family heritage as quarter-breed Chippewa.

20 mins. Cooperative summer employment programs, Leech Lake reservation and Corps of Engineers.

Cooperation with tribe on archaeology and reburial.

Longtime coexistence Corps/Indians in area.

Treated just like white man at Corps.

U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS, ST. PAUL DISTRICT

ORAL HISTORY AGREEMENT FORM

I, Irving A. Seely, a participant in
an oral history interview recorded on 1-14-87,
hereby give and deliver to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, St. Paul
District all the incidents of ownership in that interview, including
copyright, from this time forward.

Signed:

Date December 14, 1987

Irving A. Seely
Donor

PO Box 211
Address

Don't know

Signed:

W. K. Smith
Interviewer

Interview with Irving Seelye by Jo Blatti
December 14, 1987
Corps/Mississippi Headwaters Project

Tape One, Side One

Int. My name is Jo Blatti and I am interviewing Irv Seelye. We're in the Corps offices at the Winnibigosh Dam. It is Monday, December 14th and the subject of our interview is the Winnibigosh facility itself and Mr. Seelye's service with the Corps of Engineers. Could I begin by asking you how you became, how you came to work for the Corps of Engineers?

Seelye Yes, I started working with the Corps of Engineers after I got out of the service, and about 1954 I got a job at the Leech Lake Dam as a laborer over there. They was building a new warehouse, and they needed a laborer, so I went to work there.

Int. And, your family is from this part of the country? Were you -

Seelye My wife?

Int. Your family.

Seelye Oh, my family? Yes. I was born and raised right in Bena Minnesota.

Int. And, did any, I am just curious about this, because I've discovered in talking with some other people in the area that their families might have worked for the Corps or have had some kind of relationship with the dams. Was that true in your family?

Seelye No, none of my family was connected with the Corps of Engineers. My father worked parttime for the Department of Agriculture years ago, but that was just on a seasonal basis.

Int. Would this be the Forestry Service?

Seelye Yes.

Int. Your family was largely in timbering around here? Is that right?

Seelye Yes, my father was an old-time logger around here when the days of the horses and stuff. That's when he logged and stuff. He never logged after they had machinery and stuff like that.

Int. When did he stop logging then?

Seelye Oh gosh, I can't remember what year, but, it was, I suppose after the war started. I would say, around '45, '46, soon after the war.

Int. Was when things changed in terms of the timber industry. I am just trying to get these kinds of dates as I go along because it helps us to have a better sense of what is going on all around the Corps of Engineers. Once you began to work at Leech, did you kind of become a regular Corps employee? Was that -

Seelye Yes, I went to work that summer, and I don't remember, I got the records in my file, but I worked that summer seasonal at so many hours and then was laid off and never went back until the next summer, but I worked steady for the Corps of Engineers since then. Seasonal from '54 until I received a permanent appointment in '59.

Int. Ok. And your first permanent appointment was at Leech Lake?

Seelye No, I was living in Bena, and I was driving back and forth to Leech Lake. And at that time, September of '59, Orin Henderson was the damtender up here at Winni and Henry Dart was over head damtender at Leech. And Henry Dart was retiring. Ole Henderson from Winni here was going to move over and take the damtending job over there, so that left an opening here. So I didn't have to move to that opening at Leech Lake. They just automatically let me stay in Bena and make one move up to Winni here when Ole moved over there. We both moved at the same time.

Int. I see. Now when you started, when you got the damtender appointment here, did your family then move into the quarters and live here full time?

Seelye Yes.

Int. Did, let me just ask a couple of questions about the quarters so that I remember to do it. We are kind of interested in just how the damtenders actually lived in them. In things like, could you paint it to suit yourself and what kinds of arrangements did you and your family have with the Corps for rent and utilities and things like that?

Seelye I would say it is pretty much like, I don't know, I never rented too many places from anybody or anything, but from the people I know and stuff, I never seemed to be treated any different than if I had been renting

in town. Although it was a Corps place I had, I could have, do what I wanted to. I took care of the house and stuff just like you would if you was renting somebody else's. But as far as if you wanted to paint a room or something like that, you would request from your boss and he would give you an ok and you could pick any color you wanted. And they would buy the paint and you would paint it. Same way with any of the other things that happened. If anything went wrong, they bought what had to be fixed or something and you either fixed it. And if you couldn't, well, then they would have a serviceman come in and do it, if it was something that required somebody with a certain skill.

Int. Did you find that the house needed very many repairs?

Seelye No. I, like I say, that's only the second house that I ever lived in after I was married. And it was really nice for me. I mean, it was something better than I ever had in my whole life, so I find I have to say that it was really nice.

Int. Was the rent about the same as you would pay in town or something, or?

Seelye Well, I owned my own house in town, and the rent was real cheap when I moved up here.

Int. You mean the rent that you were paying?

Seelye The rent that I paid the government.

Int. Now, did you rent your house in town, is that how you - ?

Seelye No, I had borrowed money and bought a house in town.

Int. Ah

Seelye Houses were pretty cheap back then. I paid \$1,000 bucks for that house, but it didn't have no facilities, you know what I mean - no bathroom, no running water or nothing. You had an outside toilet and an outside pump and that stuff, but otherwise it was - well, that's the way the houses was in town at that time.

Int. When you moved into this house at Winni did you rent your house in town, or did you just let it go until you - ?

Seelye I sold it.

Int. Oh, I see, I see.

Seelye I sold it to a guy that wanted to buy it right away from me, so I had no problem. In them days, there wasn't a terrible lot of money, but you wasn't making a lot of money, too. I got a \$1.25 an hour when I started at Leech Lake. But then when I moved in here, that's why I say, everything was modern here. I had running water and bathroom and all the comforts a man would want for just starting out.

Int. So, it was a comfortable place for you and your family. Did you have alot of kids?

Seelye I raised three kids.

Int. Is this house big enough?

Seelye For three kids? Yeah, that is plenty big. Yeah, that house there has a master bedroom and two other bedrooms. We had a big kitchen and a big living room and a dining room. That's a big house when you get inside of it.

Int. It looks very comfortable from the outside, and I actually happen to have the floor plans in my pocket today.

Seelye It's old. I mean, it was built in 1900. I see in the records where they was building the damtenders quarters and that was in the 1900s. So, it is quite old.

Int. Now, how long did your family live in the house?

Seelye We moved in there in September of '59. My wife had a stroke in '73. Then we lived in '83, '84, my wife and I separated and then I lived there by myself until January of '85. I moved out of there in January of 1985, so I have been out just about two years now. And there hasn't been nobody in there since.

Int. Now you moved out because - ?

Seelye Well, I'm getting ready to retire and I wanted to get myself, see, I don't have no place to go or nothing, so I built myself a home over at Bena.

Int. Oh, I see, so you built yourself a new house. And it was kind of your transition for then what you would need.

Seelye Yeah, I'd have to go and have something anyway at the end. And, I am ready to retire, so I figured I might as well be paying on a house as paying rent.

Int. No, I understand, I just had the very wrong idea that you had moved out because of a policy change.

Seelye Oh no, no. I didn't have to move. They didn't ask me to move.

Int. You could have stayed until you retired, it wasn't - .

Seelye I could have stayed until I retired, I am quite sure. I mean they never asked me to go or nothing. I just decided that. See, I was going to retire a year ago.

Int. I see.

Seelye But then I had some complications, so I didn't retire. So now I am ready to retire here in a few more days. I'll be leaving here, and I just had to have a place to go, so - . I figured it would be just a year from when I moved out when I retired, but then when I had to postpone my retirement another year, so it actually worked out that its been two years. But that's the reason that I moved out.

Int. I see.

Seelye Just because I wanted to have my feet on the ground pretty good when - I didn't want to leave here

Int. And wonder what to do next.

Seelye Wonder where I was going to stay or anything. So that is why the house is vacant now.

Int. It makes sense. Are there any plans that you know of to do anything with the house?

Seelye Well, I wouldn't know for sure. I do know that they have talked about trying to have some other federal agency take it, you know what I mean? And then, they have talked about just tearing it down. They want to use that area where the house is now for a day use area for -

Int. For picnicking?

Seelye For picnicking and an overlook there. And they have plans to put the swimming beach out from there, and they got plans for what they want. But as far as to be able to tell you for sure what they are going to do, I couldn't do that, because all I know it will either be torn down or gotten rid of. There won't be no one living in it no more.

Int. I see. Now, can I ask about the officers' quarters that used to be here.

Seelye Yeah, sure you can.

Int. Ok.

Seelye I don't know if I can tell you much about it.

Int. Were they still here when you came here in '59?

Seelye No.

Int. No, they had been moved off before then. Cause I was wondering if you and your family had anything to do with that business.

Seelye No. I read alot about it though.

Int. Did you - where?

Seelye In some of the records and stuff that I read in my times around the dam here. And it tells how the officers used to come up here and people from the District Office and stay in them there. And at one time I even read where the damtender's wife did the cooking and stuff for these people. And I've seen where they used to have a big boat here that the damtender used to run for these officers and stuff when they came up here. Whatever they had to do, I don't know. But that was part of his job, and they used to pay so much for staying. I seen some pictures and that of it - a little house used to sit right between where the big one is here and the bank up there. I seen pictures and stuff of it, but - it was gone when I got here. I don't know what year they took it out. I can't remember now.

Int. Do you know where it went, did it go someplace or did it - ?

Seelye Gosh, I can't remember now where that - . I don't know for sure.

Int. I was just curious, because I think I was told over at Sandy Lake that, you know, they could remember that somebody had bought it and moved it. The one that had been at that dam had been moved somewhere around Sandy Lake.

Seelye It's funny. It seems like I knew where that went, too, but I just don't remember right now.

Int. Well, one of the things I am kind of trying to pinpoint if I can, as I talk with people is what their actual experience with the officers' quarters were. If someone came up from the office after your family moved out here in the '50s, where would they stay if somebody from the St. Paul office had business?

Seelye They got places in town.

Int. They would stay in motels or something.

Seelye Just like they do now, a motels or hotels or whatever they had at that time. But we never had to put anyone up that came up or anything, you know what I mean.

Int. Yes.

Seelye And we never had to furnish them meals or nothing like that.

Int. Do their washing or any -

Seelye No. We never got in on that stuff.

Int. Now, when you first came here the Winnibigoshish Dam was a stop log dam, wasn't it? And you had to manually -

Seelye Yeah, the logs was pulled out through the top, and the discharge came out underneath, or over the top, I meant to say. You know, over the top of the logs.

Int. Then, was that system changed here?

Seelye This one has been changed. In 1965, they put slide gates in there.

Int. Was that alot easier for you or - ?

Seelye Yup, it's really alot easier, and they have electricity down there now. They didn't have no electricity or nothing down there when I came here.

Int. Did that go in in '65, too?

Seelye The electricity? Yeah, they wired that. Well, they had electricity just as far as the big spotlight out here that they used to shine down there if you had to work down there at night. But then they put the electricity in on the dam down there. But that had been down there before '65. They put it into that gagehouse down there to keep them things from freezing up, but they put them slide gates in in '65 and made the operation of the dam 100% better than it was. Those stop logs used to freeze in, and they were always rotting and stuff, because they would be wet and dry and wet and dry. And it's quite simple to operate now. You have an electric wench that you hook on there, and it cranks them up and down.

Int. How much adjusting do you actually have to do?

Seelye Well, after the fall of the year and that, they most generally, the water control in St. Paul controls that. And they most generally get the gage set at a certain opening. And they can tell how much they want draw the lake down by spring, depending on how high the lake is in the fall. They'll give you a setting. And then, you probably won't have to move 'em all winter long. I am speaking of just Winni now. There's alot of differences. These dams don't all operate the same way. But I don't do much operating in the wintertime. And like I say, they used to, when the stop logs was in there, you used to be chopping them stop logs loose all the time.

Int. So, it was an 8-hour job just to keep things open?

Seelye Yeah, it was alot of work. But now with these new gates and that, you can go down there no matter how cold it gets, and just hook onto them and crank 'em open.

Int. Now, what else, I mean, in terms of what you do, say every week, to keep things the way they ought to be, what do you do besides check the gages on the dam? I know you were out at another dam today, this morning.

Seelye Oh, well, yeah. I was at Knutson Dam. That's over at Cass Lake, but I only have to go up there once a week on Mondays. Well, I tell you, you talking about today or when I come to work here?

Int. Oh, when you come to work here.

Seelye Oh, when I come to work here, that's when I hired out as, started as a laborer. And when I got my permanent job, I was a damtender. That was primary job, that dam down there. But that isn't no more.

Int. What is now?

Seelye Most of your day goes right into recreation. We have a campground. Alot of people in the summertime. Got a campground right over across there, and then down there on the river, they have a day use area there. So most of your day is strictly connected with dealing with campers and that kind of stuff, alot of office work and stuff, which we never had back in them days. But it's really different when you see what you did down there when you started working. And the Corps used to do pretty near all their own work, you know what I mean. If they was going to build a new boat ramp or remodel a damtender's

house or build a warehouse, it was all done in-house. They hired a few local people, and that's why I started. They had alot of different jobs going on at different sites, and if you didn't have enough personnel there, then other sites sent people over or came over and helped. But now, that's not the story. They don't have very little in-house. Don't have any laborors. Pretty near everything goes on contract now.

Int. Are the contractors often local people? Or - ?

Seelye Well, yeah. They can bid on these jobs too, but alot of them are local, but alot of them aren't too -, you know what I mean?

Int. How far away do contractors come from around here?

Seelye They try to keep within a 50 mile radius - that's what they would like, so that it isn't a contractor from way up across country someplace. But they most generally keep them very close. So far, speaking for Winni here, our contractor just - . We've only had one contractor here now since - . Otherwise, we used to do all the maintenance and stuff ourselves. But that contractor comes from over around - it was a lady had it, I think she comes from over around Remer. So she's not too far away. And then some of the other ones I know, because we've met right in town.

Int. So they take care of all the things that need to be done on the dam itself?

Seelye No, just that - . This is campgrounds and such. No, they don't have nothing to do with the dams.

Int. Oh, I see.

Seelye No, we have to take care of that ourselves. Any gate opens or maintenance and stuff on the dam, we do that ourselves. But the campground and day-use area, that is all contracted out -- the lawn mowing and the garbage and taking care of the pads. Only thing we do in there is collect fees.

Int. I see, I see. Now, how many people work here with you?

Seelye There is myself, used to have what we called a maintenance worker, but they changed him this year. He's a GS now, so he is a park ranger. They have myself, one park ranger and a park technician, and then another park ranger that spends half of his time at this site and half of his time at Pokegama Dam. So there is

3 1/2 people to keep it going. We always had laborers and stuff up until, this is the first year since I ever been here that we haven't had a laborer. Now we don't have no laborers no more. The park rangers and that, they come from, they get most of them from Mankato College, and they come in and do the ranger work.

Int. One thing that I wanted to ask about and I don't know maybe things have changed so much that it doesn't hold anymore, but I wondered where besides the dam itself, I know that there are gages several places besides the dam, are there not? And what's the, - how far around Leech -, Winnibigoshish do you actually go, for readings and things?

Seelye Readings and that? The only place that I have to go for readings is right here at the dam twice a day. We take these in the morning and at quitting time. And then, there's a gage at Denny's Harbor. That's over here on the south side of Winni at this little town of Bena. There's a gage there, and then the next one is up at Knutson Dam. That's where the Mississippi comes out of Cass Lake up there, and then there is one more in between Cass Lake and Pike Bay. There's a gage there. That's as far as I have to go.

Int. Ok, so there are four.

Seelye Yeah. And I don't have to get them everyday, either. Only these here that is right here, everyday. And them there, we get once a week.

Int. At Denny's Harbor and Knutson Bay and so - . Do you have some kind of circuit or regular pattern?

Seelye Yeah, we take them every Monday morning.

Int. Oh, all of them. You go all the way around.

Seelye On these here. I also take care of Red Lake's.

Int. Now, how far away is that?

Seelye 98 miles from here.

Int. That's pretty far isn't it? I mean -

Seelye Yes, it is pretty far. But that there is more or less on a call basis, you know what I mean. I don't have no -

Int. This machine is getting a little porky.

[Tape recorder shuts off momentarily]

Seelye I don't have no regular schedule up at Red Lake. I try to get up there once a month. I get my meter readings and check the gages and stuff like that and just do a general inspection of the dam and stuff. But if we got any work or something, like when we was doing our own work and stuff, then we would take a crew and go up there and do it. Now that's a thing of the past, too. If there is any work up there, they contract it out.

Int. Now, what do you look for when you are inspecting a dam, to see - ?

Seelye Oh, vandalism and stuff like that. See, we used to have little problems up there about people would be changing the gage settings and that. And you'd be thinking you were discharging a certain amount of water and you're really not because somebody had cranked a gate open or that kind of stuff. The metal warehouse up there would be broken into - or something like that. There was - , not too much stuff up there, but there, but that's the kind of inspection I do. Then you have rip rap inspection, you want to see if any washouts or stuff like that along the banks. The general stuff - that you know, you know how it's supposed to look and you just look around and see if it's that way.

Int. Are there any structural problems that you have to be aware of in these dams?

Seelye No. They're pretty much the same all the time.

Int. I am kind of waiting to -. This machine has gotten a little cranky this trip.

Tape One Side Two

Int. When did you first begin to get involved in recreational development here at Winnibigoshish?

Seelye 1971.

Int. It was a little later than some of the other Corps sites, wasn't it? Is there any particular reason, or was it just that you were last on the work schedule?

Seelye Really, the only reason that I ever heard talk about and stuff is that we really thought at one time that we didn't need any here, because Winni is pretty well - . As far as recreation areas, the Forestry has this side of the lake; there's a lot of recreation. They have a

big area right back here. Plughat Point there is boat launching ramps and a campground and that kind of stuff. And then right down here on this side of us they got alot of other big campgrounds down there. That's Birch's Campground and Tamarack Point and stuff. And, really, the campground we do have here is not right on the lake, you know what I mean. And it's not right on the river, it's kind of back there in the woods by itself, and it's got a different class of people than you will find out on the lake.

Int. Oh, now how are your visitors different?

Seelye Well, the people that are out camping on these lakes and stuff are more or less fisherman, you know what I mean. They got boats, they got children who want to be swimming and stuff. This is an older class of people that come back here, they're repeats. They been coming for quite a few years now. There's some of them people that I know of that come here just about since that campground open. They just keep coming back. Oh, there's fishermen and stuff in there, and there's people with kids and stuff in there, too, but that's not the main drawing card there, because it is more secluded place. It's quiet and it's not too much action going on. More or less just sitting around back in there, taking it easy.

Int. Is it mainly retired people or - ?

Seelye Lot of older people. Alot of older people in there.

Int. Is it mainly recreational vehicles or tents?

Seelye No. Mostly - yeah I know what you mean. I thought you meant these all terrain vehicles. No, it is mostly, yeah, I would say it's 90% of motor homes and trailers and stuff like that. They all have tent pads and stuff, too, cause there are still alot of people that like to do that. But it is mostly - . Now in the past couple of years, they've put electricity in there, so - you're getting - .

[Two-way radio blares]

Int. Have you noticed any change? I mean, you were just saying alot of the people you have seen have been coming back for years. Has there ever been much shift or difference in the population of people who come here?

Seelye You mean attendance and stuff? No. Our attendance doesn't change that much. I think it was less than 1% attendance this year from last year [Interviewer's

note: the sense of this is 'difference']

Int. What was it this year?

Seelye Oh, I don't remember what the figures are right off, but I know when we make out our reports at the end of the year, we made it out. I could dig it out and tell you if you wanted to know.

Int. We can do it later. It is not that important.

Seelye I've got it in the file, but I wouldn't want to say right off hand. But it is less than, well it is right around 1% is all, the change in camper days and visitation, our total visitation, so - .

Int. Do people come from all over or are they mainly Minnesotans?

Seelye Most are Minnesotans I would say. But we still get get alot of transit people. Not really transit, I shouldn't say that, because you don't get much over-night stuff. Some of our areas that are close to the highway and that, they get alot of transits, you know. They get twice the visitation, just people who want a place to pull in for the night. Where this here is not that type of people. These people know where they wanted to go before they left home; they're going to spend some time there. There's not no short stays. What I mean, is that it's at least a week end and a lot are two weeks or longer.

Int. Now, can you write in advance and say - ? You have to come - , you have to show up, don't you?

Seelye No, you can't make no reservations.

Int. And, do you have a two week limit or something?

Seelye We have a two week limit, but we are authorized to leave them stay longer if there's not a waiting list or something, you know what I mean. Not much sense in sending a person away if there's two or three pads empty. They give us a form that they can fill out, and you can give them an extension with the option that they'll have to go if you got filled up. At Winni, we don't hardly have that trouble, you know. Some of the sites that we have, just by talking to the other park managers, they have waiting lists, you know what I mean. People are waiting to get a campsite. Where, I've never had that here. I've been full alot of times here, but then people's come and seen that it's full and went some other place. But I never have them sitting

around waiting for somebody to get off one pad so they can get on.

Int. It's not exactly remote, but it's not, there are resorts all around, but - .

Seelye Oh yeah. We got a little store and stuff right up here two miles that has groceries and stuff. There's boats and minnows and cabin rentals and everything you'd - within a mile of the place. So it's not, I mean, it's close. They got telephones and stuff, you know, for doctors, close here, 14 miles is close a hospital, ambulance service, and security there. We have our own security, and also the Sheriff's Department comes out here and makes a round now and then to show that - . So you are not really just dumped out in the brush by yourself.

Int. Did people camp here before the campgrounds were open?

Seelye Well, yeah. We used to have people that would come, but not really stay, you know what I mean. They'd come out for picnics or something like that before the areas were developed. Like I can remember when they used to have weiner roasts and stuff like that down below, with just bonfires on the ground, you know what I mean, no fireplaces or nothing. But they didn't have they didn't camp, you know what I mean, set up. Of course, there wasn't too many recreational vehicles around at that time.

Int. When you first moved out here in '59, how much of the resort community was already here?

Seelye All of it. There've been no new resorts since I've been here. New owners and stuff, but all old resorts in this area.

Int. And did the Forest Service have its campgrounds then, too?

Seelye Yeah. This one was back here; that one was over there. Yeah. But they was primitive then. They didn't have no outside toilets or nothing. They didn't have no pads or nothing, but they had launching ramps and places just for bonfires and stuff. But you could camp just anyplace you wanted to. Then they developed them and put the roads in and the spurs in where they could park their vehicles and stuff. That one over there had that in already when I come, but this one didn't. They fixed this one up after I got here.

[Tape recorder switches off momentarily]

Int. These are the Forest Service. What are the names of

the two Forest Service - Service - ?

Seelye This one back here, they call it Plughat Point.

Int. Plughat. That's for the Indian chief who - ?

Seelye Well, I don't know how it really got its name. That is the name Forestry had - . At one time they had a sign down there, but it got vandalized and tore out of there. But it explained that there was an Indian village there at one time, but I don't have any knowledge of that. And this one on this side of the lake over here is Tamarack Campground they call it, and then there's Birch's.

[Tape recorder switches off momentarily.]

Int. So Tamarack is the Forest Service?

Seelye Yes, they're all Forest Service. All but this one, this is the only one that isn't.

Int. Oh, I thought they were private resorts.

Seelye No, these are campgrounds we are talking about. The resorts. Well, all these resorts right across over here. Those are really resorts where they rent boats and cabins and all the facilities in the resorts over here too, but this one where I am talking about at Plughat here and Tamarack, those are campgrounds. But the resorts, they was here, too, when I came.

Int. I recognize the names from talking to Ole Henderson and Leroy Campbell. Both of them just would talk about the resorts in this area when they were growing up, and they could remember.

Seelye Well, Ole was here before me, and I think he spent about 7 years up here as a damtender before I came here. And Leroy, he's been around for a while, too.

Int. You mentioned vandalism at a [Forestry] campground, and that that is something that you watch for in checking out the more remote dams. Is that a big problem for you?

Seelye Well, I don't have too much vandalism right here in this campground that I take care of right here. But there's alot of vandalism at Red Lake. But that, there's no campground or nothing up there. But that's a sovereign reservation, and there is not much - . It's way out, you know what I mean, that's where you're talking about getting out in the boonies. There's alot of vandalism up there, take like on signs and stuff like that - .

They're shot full of holes and - .

Int. This is on the Red Lake Reservation? And it's 98 miles from here?

Seelye From this site right here, to the dam that I look at. 98 miles.

Int. And it's a Corps dam.

Seelye Pardon?

Int. Is it a Corps of Engineers dam?

Seelye Yeah.

Int. But there is just not really much around it in terms of - ?

Seelye No, the Corps has got a little warehouse there. I think it's about 10 x 14; it's got a few stop logs and stuff like that in it, if you ever had to use them there. But there's nothing of any importance there. But any signs and stuff or anything like that you put up - they just did a new job up there this fall. They tear the railings on the dam up and stuff like that. That's the kind of vandalism I am talking about. Just don't take care of stuff, you know what I mean, just wrecking it for no reason at all.

Int. Is there any particular anger about the Corps of Engineers or anything like that?

Seelye Oh, no. I've been going up there a good many years, and I have never encountered anybody that was angry at me. They have some, what do you call it, uprising, or something there a few years back amongst themselves. But it wasn't directed at the Corps. They aren't sore at the Corps that I'm aware of. More or less in their own organization, I think.

Int. Let me ask a couple of more things. Can I go back to when you first began to work for the Corps and just ask how you became aware of it?

Seelye How I became aware of the -

Int. The Corps, I mean

Seelye Oh, well, I wasn't really aware of it. I was just looking for a job when I went to work over there [Leech Lake], and the jobs were pretty scarce. I didn't know

nobody at that time with the Corps of Engineers. I just heard over at Bena where I lived with my folks at that time that they was looking for a couple of guys to work over there. So I and another friend of mine from town went over there and asked if we could get a job, and they said sure. They were building a new warehouse over there at that time, and we just went to work there. Then, I guess, we must have did our work alright because they said if we needed anybody next year they'd call us. And when they called us and, I think my friend went with me that time, he went with the Forest Service. So I still wasn't working, so I went back each summer that they called me. And stayed right with them until they asked me if I wanted to work for them steady, and I said I did. But nobody told me about that it was the Corps of Engineers at the time.

[Office telephone rings]

Int. Before another person calls to ask you about your impending retirement, you were telling me that you really kind of came over to get a job after the World War or, sorry, the Korean War and that it turned into a full time commitment for you after several years.

Seelye Well, I worked parttime other places, but no steady jobs. I mean, that isn't the only work that I did. I worked in the woods and stuff in the winter months and stuff. So - but that is how I come with the Corps of Engineers.

Int. You must have had kind of a mind to it. I mean you must have liked working outdoors and - .

Seelye Oh, yeah, I never had an inside job in them days; it was all outside work. I guess I had, some pretty good old timers that I must have did just the right things or something, because they helped me out an awful lot to get into the Corps of Engineers. Because I didn't have no education or nothing like you have to have now. I mean, you more or less just worked your way into them jobs. I don't have no high school education or anything like that. But like I say, at the time, I think that's the biggest change I can see. When I started, it was more or less people who was really working, and there was alot more work being done, actual work being done, rather than supervising.

Int. Paperwork and - . So did you have a particular mechanical interests or - ?

Seelye No, just a plain laborer.

Int. You just kind of picked up what you learned on the job. Were there people, you were just saying that some older people really helped you out when you were younger. Who were the people you remember as important?

Seelye Well, at that time Henry Dart, the one we talked about when you came over. Henry Dart was the head damtender over there.

Int. This is over at Leech Lake.

Seelye At Leech Lake. He's the one I went and asked for the job. And then Owen Emsweiler was down at the District Office and I met him through his visits up to Leech Lake and that and got to know him real good. I didn't do nothing extraordinary. I just did what they wanted me to do. I can remember Mr. Dart come and asked me if I would be interested in working steady. And I said, well, I sure would. He just kind of told me what I had to do, and when it came time, he got the forms for me and helped me fill them out. And just kind of, more or less coached me along and put me in here [Winni]. And when I got in here, he told me all I had to do and stuff and I got doing it, and that's about the way it all developed.

Int. How often did Mr. Emsweiler come up? Do you remember?

Seelye Oh. I really wouldn't want to say how often he really came up, but there was alot of people used to come from the office. But as far as Mr. Emsweiler himself, why, I know, I'd see him every month or so, I'd say. It would be at least that and - , but there was a lot of other people from the District Office that had other business up here, too, that came up. But, I just mentioned Emsweiler because he was in our Branch at that time.

Int. Now this is hydraulics, or this is operations?

Seelye Operations.

Int. Was Wesley Walters up around much when -

Seelye I seen Wes Walters around a few times. Yeah, I can remember Wes Walters. I can't remember for sure what all their titles was at that time, you know, but I remember Wes Walters pretty well.

Int. Did you all see the other damtenders very much? I mean did you see the other damtenders - ?

Seelye Around here?

Int. Yes

Seelye Oh yeah. I remember all of them. Oh yeah, as I say, Mr. Dart was at Leech Lake. His title was head damtender when I first came here. And then Mr. Kolb, Ike Kolb, he was at Sandy Lake when I came here. And Carl Anderson was the man's name that was at Pokegama Dam and Mr. Erickson was down at, he was Gull Lake. Them was the damtenders that was working at the time I came here, and they all retired and were gone. And then, there's been another batch in between like Ole and them guys what's already gone. And the guy at Gull Lake is gone. I used to see - . I haven't seen Ike Kolb for a long time. I forgot about Henry Sharp. He was the man I was telling you about. [Recorder off momentarily] I see him every summer. He comes back here from Phoenix. I think he is out around Phoenix. He retired on a disability Henry did. He got crippled up pretty bad. Ed Sunde.

Int. I interviewed him last year when I was here. Also retired on disability, I guess.

Seelye Fitzpatrick, I seen him once last summer. I see him once in awhile. He was our immediate supervisor at one time and Milton Roppe. I don't know if you have ever - .

Int. I've heard the name; I have not met him.

Seelye He was also my supervisor at one time, and then Jim Ruyak is the present one. Roppe was ahead of him. I forget just how it went down through the - .

Int. Was it very much of a difference when you first came to work here, you reported directly to St. Paul, right?

Seelye Yeah.

Int. Was it much of a difference to have the Remer office set up?

Seelye Well, when we first came, you know, we worked with different departments like we do right today and the personnel office and the hydraulics and then the construction office, design. Wherever we had a question or anything, we used to have to go right straight to that office.

But it's different now. We go through the Remer office. I don't know if there's that much of a difference, you know what I mean. It's - I don't have that big of an operation going here I would notice

if it's any slower or faster or anything. I still get the fine service I've always got from - . Whenever I ask for anything we needed it, they make sure you get it. Because they know that you need it to get your work done, and it stands to reason they're going to get it for you. But the Remer office, it has its own function, I suppose, too, you know. It kind of centralized everything, you know what I mean. Like these meetings we have and all. Like I was telling you we have a meeting tomorrow. We all go get together there, and we have our supplies and stuff shipped right into there. And then they go ahead and send out what I have ordered and to all the other ones. It makes it pretty nice. I like that.

Like I say, if you get problems or something, that is the first stop, is Remer, you know. And if they can't solve it for you or give you the assistance that you need, they're more than willing to go to somebody that can. So, actually, there really isn't much of a change that I can see. I can't see where they have really bettered the service any and I can't see where they have hindered it any, either. Like I say, but it is so small here, you know what I mean, at this particular site, I'm just speaking for Winni whatever I say. And, I understand like Pine River, Walt Hermerding over there, he has a big operation. What's good over there for Walt might not be worth a darn for me, over here, you know.

Tape Two Side One

Int. [Recreation] ...when you first started working?

Seelye No.

Int. Do you remember when?

Seelye Well, the first person I ever remember I think was - . There was no recreation area, at least I am speaking for here now. But we used to take a survey on the lake, you know what I mean, von Lorenz.

Int. Jim von Lorenz.

Jim von Lorenz, I can remember, was in the office down there, and we used to just take a survey of the reservoir, you know. We had to count the summer homes and then resorts and then the forestry camp-grounds and stuff that was on the lake, you know, and the number of boats and stuff that was stored at summer homes and how many the resorts had. And that's the closest we came to any recreation when I came here.

Int. That's something that you did when you came here in '59? That kind of survey, and then you'd send it down to him in St. Paul?

Seelye They would request you to do that. We'd do some of it by vehicle - all that we could. You could drive to, naturally, all the summer homes, but then we would go on the lake, too, with -

Int. Oh, with a boat, and just sort of count.

Seelye Yes.

Int. But you didn't actually go - .

Seelye Anything that we could pick up - we would not only take Winni here, see, up through the Mississippi River here there's resorts and stuff, you know what I mean? And, that's all part of the recreation reservoir. They figure, they count all of that stuff, clean up towards Knutson Dam at Cass Lake - we used to pick up all of that stuff.

Int. How long would it take you to do that kind of thing?

Seelye Oh, we worked on that - . Well, we never worked on it steady, you know what I mean. But we'd spend a month or so in the fall and get that stuff in while it was still recreation season, you know what I mean, before people were gone. But we'd go for a whole day; we never just - but then we wouldn't go straight in a row, know what I mean? I would say it take us about a month to gather all that information. But I never had this stuff here to take care of at that time.

Int. There was not a recreation area at Winnibigosh.

Seelye Just the dam.

Did you ever, did you notice any changes as you were doing this over the years for him? I mean, did you notice more or fewer - ?

Seelye Oh, people?

Int. Yes.

Seelye Yeah, when they put this recreation area in here, they just swarm around here in the summertime now. But before they had an area here, it was hardly anything here. They used to fish all the time even before - before there was day use, when I first came here. They used to fish off the bank down there. Just day fishing, not camping or nothing. They couldn't drive down there then, they just had to walk. But outside

of a few fisherman and that standing down there along the river and that, there was no recreation.

Int. Did you and your family notice more traffic at the resorts or anything like that? Besides the Corps recreation area?

Seelye Since I came? Oh, yes, there's alot more traffic now. The road didn't even go by the front here when I first came here. It used to turn and go up through the woods up there. This is a new road here. There wasn't alot of traffic at that time. See, this isn't a very through highway through here anyway. It just serves for these resorts, this one down here. They all come in off this Highway 46, but I would say there is really alot more.

Int. When you were growing up here in Bena, did you notice the tourists?

Seelye The tourists? Yeah.

Int. I mean it was a big business then, too?

Seelye Yeah. See my uncle used to own a resort Or, he didn't have a resort, he didn't have cabins, but he had a fishing livery over at Bena, on the south side of the hill, he had boats. He didn't have cabins, but he had guides and stuff, and they had a real good business. But these people, they'd come by train and they stayed at the - . There were a couple of resorts right in Bena and they stayed in the resorts and then they would fish. He'd just fish them, in his boats, and that's way when I was just a kid. That is way before I even went into the service or anything.

Int. Do you remember when the trains stopped? When was that?

Seelye There was a big depot and stuff right in Bena. There was a big depot right there. A passenger train in the afternoon and a passenger train at night.

Int. Goodness, now you would have been a boy when this was - .

Seelye Oh, yeah. I was born in '27. I don't know when - . It was in the early '40s when they took that depot out of there and that's when the trains and passenger trains and that.

Int. It looked to me as - .

Seelye I must have been pretty - I can remember going to Deer River and that on them trains, though, and I was old

enough that I didn't have to go with my folks. I'd go with other young boys and their folks or something like that. So I must have been 8 or 10 years old.

Int. People who lived in the area would use the train to get around?

Seelye Yep.

Int. It looked to me as if there were tracks right along where the highway is now, that have been taken up.

Seelye Which way did you come?

Int. I came on 2.

Seelye From Grand Rapids?

Int. Yes.

Seelye There's tracks there, yet.

Int. Yes, there are still tracks. It looks to me like there was also an empty roadbed at parts.

Seelye There is an empty roadbed; that's a new highway, they just moved it over. But the same - it used to be Great Northern, now it's is Burlington Northern.

Int. So it still runs, but no passengers.

Seelye Just freights and stuff like that. A lot of grain and coal and stuff along that line.

Int. Did it become quieter when the train went out for a few years around here? Or did you really notice the difference?

Seelye Oh, no. Like I really say, I don't really remember that - , I think that the trains went out, because there was already getting a different mode of transportation in.

Int. Already more cars?

Seelye More cars. And you know, people used the train because they didn't have no other transportation. But like I say, I think this other transportation just phased itself in, so the trains just phased themselves out.

Int. Now, when your family moved out here and your kids were going to school and things like that -

Seelye None of them was when I moved out here.

Int. Did they when you lived here though? Did you have kids in school?

Seelye Yeah. They all graduated from high school. My daughter was one year old. Our oldest boy was about four, I think, and he started school. The school bus stopped right out here. They all went right from the house to that school bus until they graduated from high school.

Int. Where did they go to school? In Bena?

Seelye Deer River.

Int. Oh, ok.

Seelye About 14 miles and that. But the bus stopped right out on the highway.

Int. Great. So it wasn't a very long walk for them or anything.

Seelye No, the bus went to the resorts over here. See that is Cass County on that side over there, and this is Itasca.

Int. I noticed that the county line is right as you cross the road over to [the dam].

Seelye The bus used to go over there and turn around. So they could stay in the house in the wintertime, and they'd watch the bus go by and turn around over there, and then they would just walk out here, and the bus would come back and pick them up. So they didn't have to stand out. It was really handy.

Int. Great. So it didn't seem very remote to your family, I take it, to be living here. It wasn't a big deal to go get groceries or for the kids to get to school or - .

Seelye No, we had a car and everything.

Int. Where did your family go to movies, or to visit people and stuff like that?

Seelye Well, we did most of our visiting right back at Bena cause we both came from over there. My wife, she came from Federal Dam; that is where her mother and father lived. My mother and father lived in Bena, so all of our kids was born right in Bena, and we had all the Federal Dam and Bena was -

Int. Was kind of your home territory.

Seelye Both of us relations. That's where we did most of our visiting. And for outings and stuff like that, Deer River was about as far as we ever went for movies and stuff like that. It was better in them days then it is now; they don't even got a movie house in Deer River now.

Int. I know how you feel. I live in a town that doesn't have a movie either, in southern Minnesota, and I figure I will go to the movies in Grand Rapids while I'm here. Were there any special rules associated with the Corps housing or with the families on the government land?

Seelye No.

Int. I mean, there was no -

Seelye You mean, like certain things you could do and certain things you couldn't do. No, like I said, I never ever did, but I am sure if I wanted to have a party or anything like that - . No, I'd say, I never had parties or anything, but they never said, well, you can't have too many people come and visit you. Or you got to do this or got to do that. No, you could - . We used to have all the family gets togethers and stuff like that. We had them out here, because it was such a big house. All my folks and her folks and brothers and sisters, Christmases and Thanksgivings and everything was always celebrated right in that house. And they never - , they knew what I was doing and never once told me that I couldn't do anything.

Int. There weren't any problems - I mean your kids - it's not as if they couldn't ride their bikes or anything like that?

Seelye No, they could do [all those things].

Int. How did you like working and living at the same place, I mean ?

Seelye Oh, I really liked it.

Int. Did you?

Seelye Yes, until the recreation come in.

Int. Well, why do you say that?

Seelye I liked it even after it came in, to tell the truth. But it just put an extra burden on you. I mean, it just - your time and stuff wasn't - it wasn't your own. I don't know how to put it, I guess. But if you wanted

to go out and cook out in the yard or something, it seemed liked someone was walking across the street, you know. Or I had swings in the tree out here for my kids and half the time they couldn't get on it, because the people that was camping out here were on. It just was alot more, and they was, somebody everyday. During the days, that's part of my job to take care of them people, and I did. But I, they never required it, but there was pretty near always somebody around at nighttime knocking on the door wanting this or wanting that or something. It kind of mixed up your life a little bit, I'd say. You just didn't feel like you was alone anymore. You always expected someone to come over. And if you got too friendly with someone over there, you got to know them too good, and then naturally they would come to see you and then their kids come to see your kids or something like that.

So after that, I didn't care for it as much as I did before. But like I say, it still was good. I really liked that arrangement of government quarters and jobs. I think especially in the earlier days, it saved alot. Otherwise I'd have had to drive back and forth from town to come to work here.

And I think the security is alot better, you know. We never had no break-ins or nothing around here when I was living here. And the first year I left here, somebody broke into the office here. There is still alot of vandalism here in this area, but I think when they know that you are here, it's not quite so apt to happen.

Int. Now, in the years that you lived here and you still work here, of course, did you have alot to do with the resort people? I mean, was there just alot of back and forth, visiting or - ?

Seelye Visiting, yeah. Yes.

Int. Did the people who have the resorts live there year around?

Seelye Yeah.

Int. So, they would be your family's company in wintertime and things like that.

Seelye This family that lives at this little resort right up here on Little Winni, he passed away now, he was an oldtimer. And they were more or less our friends since we first came here, and she is still living down there. But they just closed the resort in the winter and have a separate home that they stay in.

And, the same way over here. We used to do alot of socializing with the resort people. They was always asking me questions about water levels and stuff like that, too. So we kind of exchanged favors for one another. And if I had to borrow something from them to do some work, well, if they had it, ok, and vice versa.

Int. Were there ever any big kind of water level problems while you were damtender in which the resorts were wanting more or less or something?

Seelye Well, there always is, every year. Even today there is. It's pretty hard to please the people on that side of the dam and the people on this side at the same time. It's either too high or too low. But nothing that couldn't be rationalized, talked out and explained, you know. Sometimes, they would wonder why the Corps of Engineers is raising the water so high. But then there's a reason for doing that, unless it is an act of God or something. You get a bunch of rain. Then there's nothing that anybody can do then. You can't open the dam just to get rid of that rain, because there's people sitting down below there that's probably got just as much rain, if not more than you've had. So, you explain it to them, go to a few of the meetings where they had these - the Colonel and stuff comes up every once in a while and explains this stuff. Nine chances out of ten, they'd say, now I know what was the problem there. And they get it back to where it's supposed to be as soon as they can anyway. I don't think there's ever been a time that they raised the water to hurt anybody or lowered it to hurt anybody; it was just something that you can't handle right away.

Int. Now, did you ever in your years have alot to do with wild rice and all that? Is there much ricing on Winnibigosh or - ?

Seelye There's not much ricing on Winnibigosh. No. There's a little bit of rice across the lake in some of the bays back in there. But as far as big beds, we have nothing. Leech Lake has big beds of rice though. I riced all my life, and that's where we used to rice all the time.

Int. I see. Now you riced with your family, or do you have to have rights, don't you, to take the rice?

Seelye No, you can -

Int. Oh, anybody can. I could if I had a license?

Seelye You can buy a license and take rice. The reservation -, people on the reservation, they have a special permit they just buy from the tribe, and then they can rice. Then, if they want [to off] the reservation, they need a state license, too. But most of Leech Lake is right on the reservation, so we just riced right there.

Int. Is your wife Indian, or part Indian?

Seelye Both of us are.

Int. Oh, I didn't know that. OK.

Seelye We are both quarter-breeds.

Int. I see. So you are both of the reservation community and -

Seelye We both belong to the Leech Lake Reservation and so do our children. They're also quarters, because they get half of my Indian blood from me and half from her. They get one eighth from each, of us, so we are all quarters.

Int. Is that, it's quarter, what you have to have to maintain -

Seelye It is now; it never used to be that way. It used to be that any amount, but now it is like everything else, they're changing the laws so much. Now they want you to be a - , you have to be born before a certain date before you can get on the rolls, you know. But years ago, if you was only a sixteenth or whatever, you could - as long as you had a little bit in you. You could get on the rolls. Now they won't do it that way anymore. But my kids are all quarter breds, so there's no problem. If you are a quarter, you get on the rolls, no matter when you was born. If you are under a quarter, you have to be born before, I forget what the date is now.

Int. Have you had much to do with the Leech Lake community in your capacity as a damtender? Have you done business with the tribe much?

Seelye Well, not really too much. I know the tribe placed some, I don't know what they really called them, but they wasn't SUIs or summer employment. They were something like summer employment program, you know. They had some of those people that the Corps took, you know. And all they was looking for was a place for somebody to watch them, you know, and schedule work for them and stuff like that. Keep their time. They paid them their own wages and stuff like that. That's about the only project I have had here that - . We had a

couple of them come and tried out here one summer, but they never went into that too big.

Int. This is the recreation program that you had some - .

Seelye Yeah, you could use them, you know, for when we was doing our own maintainance and stuff. Mowing lawn and stuff like that. That's the type of people they was. More or less, it was just high school kids something like that, but they applied for work through the tribe and then the tribe worked through like Jim, Mr. Ruyak. They worked through him, and he would contact us and find out, if we had any work that we could use them for. We've had a couple of them out here. They've had 'em at all the sites, I'm pretty sure. But outside of that, we haven't had too much connection with the tribe. There is really not much else that they - . They have some burial grounds and stuff like that.

Int. I was going to ask if, I understood that there are some archeological sites here, and I wondered if you had kind of gotten involved?

Seelye They had some of these archeologists come up. We had a dig here a few summers ago, and they found some stuff up there. The tribe was out here alot then, they'd come pretty often. Because this is Indian land, you know. And the stuff that they got, they sent it down to the Cities, I guess, and whoever looked at it and everything and then they brought it back and they had a regular ceremony here and another burial.

Int. Is there much feeling about that around here? Is that ok?

Seelye Yes.

Int. It is not, I mean, in some areas of the state that is offensive to people and -

Seelye No, they worked right with them. The tribe did. They had actually one of the members from the tribe, Ed Fairbanks there. He was out here pretty near every day. That way, there was no hard feelings 'cause he'd see what they were doing, and they didn't hurt nothing. They were just doing their thing, you know. So, there was no hard feelings that I am aware of.

Int. Both the Corps and the Bureau of Indian Affairs must have been here for almost, well, the Indian bureaucracy would have been here before the Corps, I guess. Is that something that people who live here are very aware of, or is it just part of life?

Seelye

I think that the people that are left now. The both of them has been here for so long that there is no feelings. It's just like, well, I don't know. The Corps of Engineers has always been here, so has the Minnesota Chippewa tribe. I don't think there is any feelings about this guy was here before that one. Like I say, I know alot of Indian families. I do alot of stuff with the tribe, with their ceremonies and stuff like that. And you never hear any harsh words or anger or anything like that against the Corps. And I am sure the Corps go out of their way to treat them right, too. I think it is pretty close knit. From this point of view anyway, I don't know how it it in Washington or anything like that. But as far as the locals, there is no - . If you are an Indian, you are an Indian and if you are a white person, you are a white person. They lived together just like that over in Bena all my life. Nobody's has ever, even after all the years of my life that I've worked with for the Corps of Engineers, they never said a word about my being an Indian. They treated me just like white men.

U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS, ST. PAUL DISTRICT

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW FORM

Narrator Name: LaVain (Lee) H. Staley

Address: Box 764, Federal Dam, MN 56641

Date of Interview: December 12, 1987

Place of Interview: Capt. Kirk's Grocery, Federal Dam

Name of Interviewer: Jo Blatti

Project Title (if any): Headwaters Interviews, Series II

Narrator Biographical Information:

Full name (including maiden name): LaVain H. Staley

Year of Birth: October 25, 1926

Spouse's full name: Bardwell James Staley

Subjects Discussed:

Staley family vacation visits to Federal Dam area beginning 1945, purchase of Wescott's Launch Service ca. 1973; concession leases at Federal Dam; fishing for walleyes and muskies; town of Federal Dam; increasing tourism; dwelling at Leech as historical facility; relations with Corps; local Indian acquaintance; promotion of tourism in area.

TAPE RECORDING:

No. of Cassettes: 2 No. of Reels & Speed: _____

Length of Interview: 1 hour, 10 minutes

Release form signed (date): December 12, 1987

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TAPE INDEX
Mississippi Headwaters Interviews, Series II
Interview with Lee Staley by Jo Blatti
December 12, 1987
(One hour, 10 minutes)

Tape 1, Side 1

- 0 mins. Ownership Wescott's Launch Service at Federal Dam 14 years.
- Staley family's Illinois background, 20-year history as visitors to Headwaters, customers of Wescott's previous to purchase
- Moved to Federal Dam year-round in 1978
- Describes business and services: 4 20-ft. Chris-Craft boats, licensed to hold 14 people, 5 resort cabins
- 7 mins. Prices and reservation system for boats, \$18 per 1/2 day per person
- Describes typical muskie and walleye catches on Leech Lake
- Story of Pine River convent customers
- Explains drifting and trolling methods of launch fishing
- Notes that fishing parties tend to follow launch services in search of productive areas
- Describes present business conditions for Federal Dam concessionaires, change among owners in past 10-15 years
- 14 mins. Remembers \$2.00 launch charge when first started coming to area
- Notes increasing visitation Federal Dam area over past 20 years
- 20 mins. More boats than ever on the lake
- Launch business as cutthroat in former times, Mrs. Staley as instrumental in breaking old rule about not talking during season
- 25 mins. Lengthening of concession leases to 20 years; pay flat rate every 6 months; all the leases the same - more than doubled after water and sewer lines went in
- Do and don't for concessionaires at Federal Dam - liability insurance, appearance of concession
- Chris-Crafts: \$1000 per foot, anticipated use 25 years
- Enumerates employees necessary to keep launch service and cabins operating

Tape 1, Side 2

- 0 min. Fishing habits of visitors, describes 2 daily runs of launches 8 a.m.-1 p.m., 2-7 p.m.
- Describes bait, minnow and jig lure
- Emphasizes good relationship with Corps, describes current allotments of land to concessionaires
- Waterfront Cafe as 4th concession, good business in season
- Few changes in Federal Dam during his time in community, his family as newcomers, well-accepted, asked to serve on town council, off-season socializing
- Describes working day during season -- 5:30 a.m. to 10/10:30 p.m.
- 10 mins. Indicates business fairly close to same over the years, lots of repeat customers, their children and grandchildren
- Suggests slightly greater percentage his customers may be coming from Corps campground
- Does not believe Corps campground hurting other business, repeats his customer's praise for Corps facilities
- Notes more people seem to be coming into area from farther away
- 17 mins. Local campground manager usual point of contact with the Corps
- Dwelling at Leech, no memory of rental in Staley's time, empty since Ed Sunde's retirement
- Suggests possible use of dwelling as historical facility
- Notes Battle Point monument, indicates that area Indians have discussed that engagement but does elaborate
- 24 mins. Describes cordial relationship Leech Lake Indian tribe through shared activities - spaghetti dinners, Leech Lake Alliance, hunting, lots of trade with Wescott's

Tape 2, Side 1

- 0 mins. Wife's role in getting to know area Indians socially
- Reaffirms good relationship with Corps
- Identifies modest advantages Corps concession lease - protected landing and high traffic, avers that lease and taxes roughly comparable to land ownership
- Describes billboard at Princeton and other promotional activities of area resort owners

U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS, ST. PAUL DISTRICT

ORAL HISTORY AGREEMENT FORM

I, LaVern H. Staley, a participant in
an oral history interview recorded on 12th December 1987,
hereby give and deliver to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, St. Paul
District all the incidents of ownership in that interview, including
copyright, from this time forward.

Signed:

Date 12/12/87

LaVern H. Staley
Donor

Box 764
Address

Federal Dam, Minn. 56641

Signed:

J. B. Smith
Interviewer

Transcript
Corps/Mississippi Headwaters Project
Interview with Lee Staley by Jo Blatti
December 12, 1987

This is Jo Blatti interviewing Lee Staley in the grocery store in Federal Dam, Minnesota. It is Sunday, December 12, 1987 and the subject of our conversation is his work as a concessionaire, operating facilities at the Leech Lake Dam facility operated by the Corps of Engineers.

Int: I know that your business is the Wescott Launch Service, is that right?

LS: That is correct.

Int: Can you tell me how long you've been operating it?

LS: This next year will be our 14th year that we have had it. The previous owner had it for 27 years.

Int: I see. Now, how did you get into the launch business yourself?

LS: I come up to Minnesota on vacation. First time I come up to Minnesota was 1945, and then I started coming up to this area. I was a customer for 20 years of Wescott's Launch Service -

Int: Oh, really.

LS: Then I bought it.

Int: Now what gave you the idea to - where did you live and what were you doing there?

LS: I lived in - about 30 miles south of Chicago.

Int: Where?

LS: Sauk Village, Illinois.

Int: Okay, and what were you doing there if I may ask?

LS: Been railroading, I was an editor of a newspaper. I was also a circuit court judge of Cook County, Illinois.

Int: Oh my goodness. Now what made you make the switch into north central Minnesota and the launch business?

LS: Oh my wife and the previous owner were talking one day, and my wife had mentioned that I would like to have a resort, and they said they would talk things over and see what we could come up with. They were ready to retire.

Int: Ah ha - But you weren't, were you? I mean, this would have been.

LS: No.

Int: You weren't at retirement age taking on a second career, really?

LS: Well, I had a son that come up and started running the place for me after I bought it.

Int: I see. So when did you move up here yourself?

LS: About 8 years ago.

Int: I see.

LS: About 9 years now.

Int: So, it would be in the late 70's that you moved up here year around?

LS: Yes, right - 1978.

Int: Can you just describe the business and the services that the launch service provides?

LS: Well, we have a lot of people that don't own their own boats, and they like to go fishing. And some are -, oh, they're actually all ages. And we have company groups that like to reward their employees on fishing trip by taking them fishing on a launch service. We also have cabins that we can accommodate people, which is off the Army Corps property.

Int: Where are the cabins?

LS: They are uptown.

Int: What's that mean from Federal Dam?

LS: Well, that's about 2 blocks away from where we're at at the present time.

Int: I see, and they are right in the town of Federal Dam?

LS: Yes. Yes, they are.

Int: Okay. How many cabins do you operate?

LS: We operate 5. We have 3 two-bedroom cabins and 2 three-bedroom cabins. We've had as high as, oh, 30 some people at one time.

Int: What is your season? I mean, when do you officially think, you consider that -

LS: At the, starting at the walleye fishing, which is the closest Saturday to the 15th of May.

Int: Okay, and when does it close?

LS: Then, we usually close about the second weekend in October.

Int: Okay. How many boats do you actually have in your fleet?

LS: I have 4.

Int: Okay. Is that, in terms of operations in this area, is that medium size or big or small?

LS: Well, that's, uh, a little bit above average. Most of them have, will have anywhere from 1 to 3.

Int: Okay. How big are your boats? Are they like Boston Whalers?

LS: No. 20 foot Criscrafts.

Int: Okay, with a motor?

LS: Yes, inboard motors.

Int: What does, and how many people can fish comfortably?

LS: Mine are inspected by the Coast Guard and are licensed for 14 passengers per boat.

Int: I think they are bigger than I thought they were. What's a good season for you, are you booked solid or are there holes in the calendar, usually?

LS: Well, our type of business, a lot of it is day by day. We have a lot of business from other resorts. People want to go launch fishing. They'll come up and stay at another resort, maybe they'll go out in a small boat. And then they like to bring their family or friends over and go out in the launch, maybe a couple times when they are staying at another resort on a smaller lake.

Int: So they will come up here for the day. How much of your business is actually people who stay in the campgrounds that the Corps operates? Do you have anyway of knowing that?

LS: Oh, it's pretty hard to say. I haven't worked out a percentage on it. We get some business from the campground. People will come up and stay a week or two at the campground and go out fishing several times. Like I have people from California come all the way here and stay in the campgrounds. The last two years, they've gone fishing with us almost everyday while they are staying in the campground.

Int: Now, say if a couple wants just a - so I -. Remember, I'm kind of learning this in a way, I don't know the specifics of your business at all. If say, do people sign up so that you fill up the boats every day. A person doesn't rent a boat, a person rents space on the boat, is that the way it works?

LS: Well, we have some people that will want the boat for themselves. They pay a minimum price for that, which is equal of about 6 customers.

Int: I see.

LS: On the other hand, we have a lot of people, one or two people, who want to go fishing the next day, they make a reservation. We honor it whether we get any more people or not.

Int: I see.

LS: Because we feel once they made the commitment, it's up to me to keep that commitment. And it works out real good that way.

Int: Can I just get some base line prices from you so I would know, for say the 1986-87 season, what would it cost to reserve a space on the boat or to reserve the boat?

LS: Well, it's \$18.00 for a half a day per person. And if the people wanted the boat for themselves, it would cost them \$108.00.

Int: For half a day.

LS: For half a day.

Int: Okay.

LS: Except for muskie fishing, we charge \$110.00 for a half a day, and we only allow 4 people to fish.

Int: Now, why is that, the fish are so big?

LS: The fish are big, and the equipment we use is larger. And if you get a big fish on, you don't want to take a chance on a lot of tangled lines.

Int: Now, how big do muskies get?

LS: Well, the biggest one, I believe, out of here I think was about 54 pounds.

Int: So that's about half a person?

LS: Well, it was pretty good size.

Int: Yeah. Now this is a muskelunge, and how big do the walleyes and things get to be around here?

LS: Well, this last fall my son caught one 8 lbs. 4 oz. There's been larger ones caught. Had a woman one day sitting next to me, she caught a 9 lb. 10 oz. walleye.

Int: So they run 8-10 pounds, is the outer limit there?

LS: Those, they're not very common. Of course, I heard of one woman this last fall that got two of them inside of a couple days of over 9 pounds.

Int: Are a lot of your customers women, I mean, is it family? I mean, when you think sometimes of fishing and camping is very masculine things to do.

LS: Well, we had one group who use to come here all the time. They were nuns from Pine River Convent and the one nun's mother use to bring them here to go fishing. And they always wanted me to guide them. They always had a lot of fun, joking, you know, and they enjoyed themselves.

Int: Were they good fishers?

LS: Oh yes. Couple of them were beginners, but they all learned.

Int: What does it take to be a good fish fisherman or good fisherwoman?

LS: It takes proper instruction and patience.

Int: Is this the kind of fishing that you troll, or you cast or?

LS: Usually we drift.

Int: What is that? You mean you just put the line in the water and -

LS: We drift with the waves, normally. Of course, if there's no wind, and there is no wave action, then we have to troll.

Int: Are there, do you have kind of a territory on Leech Lake, that is kind of the Staley's fishing grounds or?

LS: No, it's something you can't have any hold over. We have certain areas that have been productive at certain times of the year which we go to. I recall one day I went to one spot and caught about 3 walleyes before I got to that particular spot. After fishing about 3 hours, went to that spot, fished there an hour before we went in. And we caught about 24 more walleyes, and at that time, that particular time of year and that week fishing was slow. I went back out to that spot, I was the only one there in the morning, and when I went out there in the afternoon, we counted it and there was 58 boats followed me.

Int: My goodness.

LS: They were around us in a little circle.

Int: Hoping your luck would rub off, huh?

LS: Yes.

Int: How many other concessions are now operating at Leech Lake besides the Wescott Boat Launch?

LS: At Federal Dam?

Int: Um huh.

LS: There was 5. Two of the launch services are out of business now.

Int: They just retire or -?

LS: Well, one sold out, and they turned it into a restaurant.

Int: I see.

LS: And the last one was just negotiated with the Army Corps; they opened up additional parking area for the people staying in the campground.

Int: Oh, I see, so there are only 3 launch services operating right now?

LS: That is correct.

Int: Is there any problem about business supporting the 5 of you, I mean, is it getting thin in any way?

LS: Well, the actual business for 5, was not, I don't believe was sufficient for 5, and I believe under the present conditions, it should be sufficient for 3.

Int: I wondered because I was reading in the 60's, when the Corps first started developing the campgrounds and things in a bigger way, it said that there were 5 concessions operating. Are there 5 companies that have been there the same 5 as far as you know?

LS: No.

Int: Oh no?

LS: They are all new owners, we are actually the oldest owner there now.

Int: Oh really?

LS: Yes.

Int: So there has been a lot of change in the past few years.

LS: Yes, in the last, o'. 10 - 15 years.

Int: I see, about the time you bought Wescott?

LS: Yes, gradually along the - since then places have changed hands.

Int: Now, some questions I thought that - I knew that Wescott's had been in business for over 40 years, but I didn't know that you hadn't run it for over 40 years. So some questions I would have asked about running the boat launch service I want to kind of recast a little bit, cause you've been coming up here for a long time and see if I can if you - things you might have noticed I was going to ask you about customers, but I think it will be more about fellow campers after the war.

I was very - one thing I wondered about, I guess before I ask about general things, is to go back to the fish guides business for a minute. There seems - looking at the old records and documents in the State Historical Society -. Apparently, there have been fish guides and concessions at the Dam at least since the very early 20th century. There are booklets and brochures for people who travelled the railroads and came up here, and I've seen things from 1912 and 1920s and 1930s. And I wondered how much that kind of business is remembered by people who is in the area today. Is that kind of part of the local history or the -?

LS: Well, of course, they had railroads here; they had round house, hotel, bank; it was quite a thriving in town years ago until the logging business went out. And it sort of died, compared to what it was. And ever since I have been coming up here, there have been guides here, on the lake and the launch services. I remember the first time I come up over here, the charge for going over on the launch was \$2.00.

Int: This would have been in '44, '45, along about in there?

LS: Yeah.

Int: And that would be all day or half a day?

LS: That'd be half a day.

Int: Yeah. I wanted to get some sense if people remembered the difference in prices. Of course, people's incomes are bigger now.

LS: Yes, the cost of operations are quite expensive now, especially the insurance.

Int: Did - when you use to come up here as a tourist, before you bought a business and moved up here yourself, where did you stay, what kind of -?

LS: I stayed over at a small resort on another lake.

Int: Okay.

LS: And I heard about the place over here so I started coming over here a couple of times. And then after that, during my stay at this other lake -. Finally, I would take a cabin over here, and I stayed right here and I would go out fishing every day all day long on the launches.

Int: Did you ever stay in the campgrounds or -?

LS: I didn't.

Int: Okay, did.

LS: I have a lot of customers that do.

Int: Yeah, when the Corps began to build up the campgrounds, were you aware of that as a visitor or did that, was that something you noticed?

LS: No, there wasn't - well, I noticed a little bit, but there wasn't that much advertising on it. There wasn't that much knowledge of it, and, of course, now I get all kind of comments from customers and people that stay in the campgrounds that that's one of the finest campsites they've ever been in.

Int: Did um - have you noticed changes in the way things are in Federal Dam over the years that you've been coming-both as a visitor and now as a resident. I mean -?

LS: There is an increase of people using this area for recreational purposes.

Int: Um huh. When do you, can you remember when you really noticed that there seemed to be more people coming in?

LS: Oh I don't know, I would say maybe the last 20 years or so.

Int: Um huh, when you were coming up, when you first started coming up here did you first start think of it as kind of a private place? Were you annoyed to see more people around or anything like that? Sometimes people are, that's the only reason.

LS: Well, yes, when you get out there, and you're fishing and you're starting to catch fish and everybody start's moving in real close. (laugh) I mean if, if they use a little discretion but - it's acceptable, you know.

Int: Uh huh, it's funny.

LS: It's human nature.

Int: Yeah. Well, I was surprised when you said as many as, you know, you could see as many as 58 boats in a cove in a knot on occasion. I've only been up here in the winter so I see it when it's very quiet.

LS: Oh yeah.

Int: And (laugh) -

LS: Actually, this last summer, I believe there was more boats out on this lake than I had ever seen before.

Int: What does it look like when it's full, is it just dotted or -?

LS: Oh, you have boats all over. They'll get in groups in different places. Some - uh, normal thing for people to do when they've never been here, they'll go out on the lake if they've got their own boat. And they'll see 2 or 3 boats in one spot, so they'll move in. And pretty soon, somebody else moves in and they figure, well, maybe that person radioed a friend and they're catching fish. So they all started moving into one spot, and maybe they aren't catching any good at all.

Int: That's interesting. I would have thought. Now, this shows how a non-fisherman thinks. I would have thought that people who were fishing would kind of be dispersed and wouldn't be -. It's sounds so sociable; I always think it of kind of a solitary thing to do or a thing to do in a small group.

LS: No, it doesn't work quite that way.

Int: Semi-public huh, this is a social occasion?

LS: And, of course, the natural thing for people to do if they hadn't been on a lake even if they are familiar with the area, they feel that we know where the best fishing is.

Int: So, they follow the launch services.

LS: That happens quite a bit.

Int: I see. Now, do the concessionaires who all have outfits working off the Leech Lake on the Corps landing there, kind of work together? I am just curious as to how things work in this kind of situation?

LS: Well, in the past before myself and my wife bought the place, it was quite a cutthroat business.

Int: What do you mean?

LS: The owners wouldn't talk to each other during the season, so many jealousies, petty jealousies and so forth. And I hold my wife as instrumental in breaking that whole trade up where everybody was always angry at everybody else.

Int: Now how did she do that?

LS: Well, she broke the golden rule of talking to other people during the season. And we've become very good friends with our competitors. And we don't have any animosity towards them. And, for instance, when we get filled up, people want to go out fishing, we call up our competitors and see if they have room. And they've done the same thing with us. Now, where in the old days they'd say 'no, we don't have room' and that's it.

Int: Now did your wife know she was breaking the rules, or did she just?

LS: Well, she couldn't see the old animosities the different businesses had toward one another. And we felt that it was best if everybody got along, because when people come up here and they want to enjoy themselves. They don't want to hear bickering between different people.

Int: Yeah. Was Federal Dam any different than any place else in that respect, do you think? Is that - are concessions suppose to be unfriendly, is that things?

LS: Well, I don't know about other landings elsewhere; there was such a jealousy involved between the different operators of the concessions.

Int: Was that, I was going to ask, and it may have changed, but I was going to ask, did you all make out your leases with the Corps together? I mean, was it a kind of an equal -?

LS: Yes.

Int: Oh, so you all did that together?

LS: Yes, we always signed our leases with the Corps. At the last time we signed leases, uh, there was discussion, the previous times there was 5-year leases, the last time, we discussed.
[Machine cuts off momentarily]

Int: This uh - I noticed this before; I have a spare machine with me. It's never done this before, but it's started turning itself off one day this week.

LS: But anyway, we lengthened the lease to 20 years with the Corps.

Int: Oh, really.

LS: Yes, instead of 5-year leases. I mean, they never refused a renewal lease, but it gives a person more sense of security, and they are willing to invest more money into the upkeep of their individual places.

Int: Well, I can appreciate that. It -, I wondered if there was any difference, I guess I thought you might tell me that they were even shorter leases, but that's not the.

LS: No.

Int: So, there's a real long-term commitment to the concessions here. Uh, do you mind if I, do you have to pay money or pay a percentage, ok how -?

LS: Yes.

Int: Or how.

LS: We pay a flat rate, every 6 months.

Int: Um hmm, even in the off season?

LS: Oh yes.

Int: Yeah.

LS: It's based on an annual figure.

Int: Is it based on what you take in or what -?

LS: No, they are all the same.

Int: I see.

LS: The leases are. Increased the lease or they more than doubled it after they put in the water line and a sewer line for the concessions.

Int: Now when did that happen?

LS: Well, it was about 4 or 5 years ago.

Int: I see all the, I see, I have written down all of the improvements that have been made, but sometimes I don't know whether it's been tied to the campground or to the concession area. So I just go around asking people about these things, and then go back and look at it, and see how it's shaping up here. Let me just double check here, you know what. [Machine off momentarily] I won't take an awful lot more of your time on this, but we were just talking about the leases and the fact that you and all the other concession people have signed 20-year leases over next door to where we are. Are there any special qualities to the relationship with the Corps, anything -? Are there a list of dos and don'ts that you all -?

LS: Oh yes, we're governed by certain regulations. I mean, we all have to carry liability insurance and keep our places, the appearance of our places up.

Int: Uh huh, who makes that decision, I mean -?

LS: Oh, it's usually the dam tender or the person in charge of the campground - ah - makes any decision as far if they feel something is wrong. And, of course, the Army Corps inspects our docks and so forth.

Int: Now do you build your own docks, or do they build them?

LS: We build them.

Int: I see, I see. Do you actually take things up in the winter, or do you have permanent year-round -?

LS: No, the docks are permanent. Because of the river, the ice doesn't break up the docks, like it would out on the lake with the high wind when the ice is breaking up.

Int: Um hmm. So it's a protected kind of place.

LS: Yes. It is.

INT: Is there a lot of competition for the places at this landing; are there people kind of in line waiting to be concessionaires, or is it a fairly -?

LS: Well, it's limited. My understanding it's limited to the 3 launch services presently operating, and I don't know about as far as anybody waiting in line to buy 'em, it I don't know. I've had people try to buy boats off me.

Int: Uh huh.

LS: Seen my launches and wanted to know if I would sell one.

Int: Uh huh, how much does a launch cost you, do you mind?

LS: Well, I've a -, the last quote I heard, it cost about a \$1,000.00 a foot.

Int: So they, very -, they're big investments?

LS: Yes, they are.

Int: About how long does one last, in terms of its use in this kind of service?

LS: Well, if they are taken good care of, they'll last about 25 years.

Int: So that's a long term investment, as well.

LS: Yes, and it's a lot of work to keep in a good operating shape.

Int: How many people do you employ in the season?

LS: Actually, I have one woman that comes in and cleans cabins. I have some young, some school children that clean fish; I say young, they're high school.

Int: Uh hmm.

LS: And like I plan on next year possibly employing a couple more people.

Int: But you do all the fish guiding yourself?

LS: No, I have other guides. There's three other guides besides myself, also.

Int: Okay, do you have to have a mechanic or is that -?

LS: Yes. Yes, you never know something, when a boat starts acting up, we won't take it out without checking it over to make sure everything is operating properly.

Int: Let me turn this over it's -

Tape 1, Side 2

Int: Now do people fish in the rain or is that?

LS: Oh, yes. Diehard fisherman never gives up.

Int: I see. And do people fish in the evening, is that a - are there, we were talking about half day and I just assumed it was morning and afternoon. Is there an evening shift as well?

LS: Actually, we go out at 8 in the morning and come back fairly close to 1 o'clock, and then we go out at 2 and come back close to 7 o'clock.

Int: I see, so that's, that afternoon shift's a very long time?

LS: Well, it's the same as the morning.

Int: It just seems like it's (laugh) - I suppose it's true, 5 hours is 5 hours. So there's not an 8 to midnight shift or anything like that?

LS: No, there isn't.

Int: Do fish not bite at night, or is it that guides don't work at night?

LS: Well, the fish will bite in early evening, but I found out as a rule, it doesn't pay to go out late at night. Occasionally, you might catch some fish, but I've had some friends go out at night, 9 at night and stay until 2 o'clock in the morning and come in

with 2 fish. Of course, our operation is long enough for those hours anyway. Of course, we furnish bait to the campgrounds, people that have their own boats, we service them with gas and oil for their boats.

Int: What is the preferred bait around here, what is it that fish bite on?

LS: Minnow.

Int: Okay.

LS: Minnow, and what they call a jig.

Int: I don't know what that is.

LS: It's a lead head, it's made out of, there is a lead weight right on the hook itself and you put a minnow on the end.

Int: I see.

LS: Bounce that on the bottom.

Int: It kind of looks like a fish, doesn't it, the jig?

LS: No, the jig don't look like a fish, but it has the action of a fish with the minnow on it, the way it bounces through the water.

Int: Okay, okay. I'm afraid my ignorance is showing here. (laugh) Have I asked you things that just have made you think a little bit of, are there things you would want to point out to me about the Corps or your, you know, the way the concessions operate in this area or -?

LS: Well, the only thing I can say, we have a good working relationship with the Army Corps. I mean, I've never had any problems. I mean, we've never had anything develop that couldn't be corrected.

Int: What kinds of things do develop, just out of, I mean what kinds of things need to be worked on on occasion, just so I have a sense of what might come up?

LS: Well, actually, myself we haven't had any real problems with the Corps. I know one concessionaire did have, but, that was, I believe, his own choosing.

Int: Um, I've been told about a, at one point, this would have been long before you built, or bought Wescott, I was going to ask you about it, but that was when I thought you'd been here for 40 years as a concessionaire. At some point, apparently, a delegation of concessionaires did go down to St. Paul to talk to people about things. But this was long ago, you know, over 20 years ago. And

I was told also about a time, again, at least 20 years ago, in which there was a problem here, I believe about an outhouse that went directly into the lake, and that just wasn't sanitary.

LS: That I don't, I don't recall that.

Int: This would have been a long time ago, and I wanted to ask about it, in case you knew about it. But it was before your time as an owner so I'm not sure it would have -.

LS: Well, I didn't have any knowledge about that particular thing. Of course, I was glad when the Corps put in water and the sewer line.

Int: Did you have outhouses before that?

LS: Yes.

Int: Where did you have to put them?

LS: On the back of the property line, so to make sure that they would not flow into the river or the lake.

Int: Now how big of, how -, what are the dimensions of the property that is, you don't own it, you just lease it, right?

LS: Yes, lease a 100 foot of lake frontage, or river frontage.

Int: And how far back does it go, then?

LS: Uh, about 200 feet roughly.

Int: So long, narrow.

LS: The lots aren't exactly square.

Int: But who cares, huh? (laugh) It's not as if you are planting fields on them or something.

LS: That's correct.

Int: Does everybody have roughly the same kind of allotment?

LS: Yes, that is correct.

Int: You mentioned that one of the launch services had been turned into a cafe. Is that the only facility of its sort over there?

LS: Yes, it's the only cooking facility outside of pizzas and microwave sandwiches.

Int: So they, they haven't -, have they actually been in operation yet, or is that coming?

LS: Yes, it's been in operation for about 3 years.

Int: And how's it doing? I'm just curious.

LS: I know they're, they're, they do quite a good business during the season.

Int: I would think, I mean just from my days as a kid on a family camping trip or something, all the teenagers would hang out and want to buy malts and that the grown ups would want food that they hadn't cooked.

LS: Yes, there are a lot of people when they go on vacation, they like to relax, the women don't like to cook. And they like to go into the restaurant maybe for breakfast or lunch or supper.

Int: So it's a - have you noticed the changes in the town of Federal Dam in the years that you've been coming up?

LS: Not a great deal of change, no.

Int: Not a lot of openings and closings or has it expanded any? I know it was a bigger town at one time, but I wondered if the new tourist influx has changed the town outward?

LS: I don't really believe it's changed too much. Not over the years, it's stayed about the same since I've been here.

Int: Not too much new construction or -?

LS: No. Oh, there's a couple of homes being constructed outside, just outside of town limits -

Int: But -

LS: But that's by youngsters that got married, they're still living here.

Int: Yeah. How do people, what are the main businesses here besides the dam and the tourist trade? What do people, how do they make their livings?

LS: Well, a lot of them work. Some work at Blandin. Others work at construction and various occupations in neighboring towns.

Int: If they work in Blandin, do they go all the way into Grand Rapids?

LS: Yes.

Int: That's a long commute isn't it?

LS: It's about 42 miles, roughly.

Int: Are a lot of people in this town, in your observation, people who are born and raised here or -?

LS: Yes, or moved here years back, most of them. We have a couple families moved in since I have.

Int: Are the Staleys newcomers, or have you kind of -?

LS: Well, we've been, as the saying goes 'accepted'. In fact, I'm, at the last election here in town, I was asked the night before the election if I would run on a write-in campaign for the town council. I said yes. So starting next month, I'm on the town council.

Int: I see. So you kind of, you have really kind of blended into the town.

LS: Yes.

Int: I would guess that you would have lots of opportunities to get to know people running the business?

LS: Oh yes. In off season, we mingle quite a bit.

Int: What's your, I mean, when the season's on, is your family pretty much preoccupied with the business? Do you -?

LS: When it's on, yes.

Int: Not a lot of potluck suppers on, - on -.

LS: No.

Int: It's really -.

LS: Well, we have an association of the various businesses on this end of the lake, and I'm also secretary/treasurer of that.

Int: I see.

LS: Uh, we have potlucks together in the off season when we get together.

Int: What is, can you just tell me a little bit about what a working day is like during the season? What kind of, um how your family has to plan around the boat launch service?

LS: Well, I get up about 5:30 in the morning, and around 6:00 o'clock we have people showing up wanting bait, gas. And our regular customers start showing up after 7:00. We have to get things ready in the boats and take them out fishing. And it's quite a long day when you go out fishing, come back in around 1 o'clock, eat a hurried lunch and get the boats ready to go back out and come in about 7. And we are usually open until about 10-10:30 at night, because a lot of people want to stop by to pick up bait or tackle.

Int: Get ready for the next morning or something.

LS: Yes, including people with their own boats.

Int: Yeah, yeah. So did you pretty much, you and other family members maintain the store from 5 until 10?

LS: Yes, right.

Int: It pretty much takes care of available daylight, doesn't it?

LS: Right, right.

Int: So there's a reason to kind of relax in the off-season.

LS: Oh, yes.

Int: Yeah, yeah. Have there been any particularly bad or particularly any good years for the businesses in the time that you've been running one here? Was there a bad weather year or something that affected you all, or cold weather year? Or, do you find it fairly even?

LS: Well it's been fairly even, like the year before last our business increased quite substantially. And I don't know how it's going to be this coming year. That's something you can't forecast.

Int: Right.

LS: But we have a lot of customers that have been coming here for 25-30 years. And then, we've had their children start coming here.

Int: Um.

LS: When they come here, the children come here with their parents, and then they'd come here. And we have some where their grandchildren are coming here.

Int: Plus new people who enter the area.

LS: Right.

Int: Do you see any decrease or any change? I mean, it doesn't sound like it, it sounds like more and more people are coming.

LS: Well, there is more and more people coming to the campground. That's increasing quite a bit.

Int: Are their fewer people using the resort facilities, the cabins or is that -?

LS: No, it stays pretty close to the same. We have a lot of people who come here year after year. Some of them come several times a year from out of state, even.

Int: Did high gas prices a few years ago change your business? Or was that -.

LS: That did affect, affect business a little bit. People would call, wonder whether they could get, well, like in '76 when they had that gas crunch, people would call wondering if they could get gas in order to get up here and get back.

Int: Hum huh.

LS: But outside of that, well, people are still coming up here.

Int: I just - something that's come up, and I don't know how to weigh it. I'm just kind of asking everybody a little bit about it. Is, um, the issue of whether the Corps should be developing campgrounds, or whether that should be left to private people to do. Is the Corps in competition with free enterprise has come up on a couple of occasions, and I just wondered if that were something that came up in your -?

LS: Well, I've heard comments to that effect by other resort owners. And yet, by the same token, it increases our general business in this area. The campgrounds do, including the Corps campground. Because the people never bring everything they want to on vacation, always forgetting something or may want to get fresh supplies, such as food and so on.

Int: So, in your observation, the grocery stores and the bake shops and the restaurants do seem to, I've kind of heard it both ways, so I'm collecting everybody's opinion on this.

LS: Well, I don't think the Corps campground is hurting anything. I think, it's, like I mentioned earlier in the interview, that we get so many comments about it, being the nicest campground that people have been to. They've been to different state parks, campgrounds, the one here at Federal Dam is -

Int: Gets high marks, huh?

LS: Gets high marks in regards to people's previous stays at other campgrounds. Like I mentioned before, we got one customer comes from California, and they stay in the campground for a couple weeks every year. And, I mean, they get people from all over that -

Int: I was going to ask -

LS: Love to camp out, rough it, as they call it.

Int: Do, you think it's roughing it now, or is it a lot of RVs?

LS: Well, it isn't so much roughing it now, it's so many people have RVs. And, of course, washing facilities at the campground are very nice for showers, and so on. People enjoy it; they meet new friends; they make friends with other people.

Int: Now, when you first started coming up here were you tent-camping, your family or?

LS: No, when I first come up, it was in a regular cabin, -

Int: Oh, that's right, you said you stayed in a cabin; I'm sorry, I was just kind of thinking of the campgrounds.

LS: No, I never stayed in any campgrounds myself.

Int: I must admit I like cabin; I like a roof. (laugh)

LS: I do, too. Of course, that's the way I started, so.

Int: Let me just look, I think I've asked everything I can think of, so let me just double check my list and -. I wanted to ask if you've seen any change in visitors over the years. If you've noticed anything, in particular, about -

LS: Any change in the?

Int: In the visitors?

LS: Well, we've been getting people from further away that have stopped here by accident. And then, are those, I don't know if they get a federal map of some kind that shows federal campgrounds, or what. But they get recommendations from other people that happen to stop here and camp. And we get a lot of people from local area, what I call locals, the state area that come here.

Int: Now when you say locals do you mean as far as below the Twin Cities, or do you mean -?

LS: Well. The Twin Cities and below the Twin Cities, yes. Because they've heard of it from friends.

Int: Um huh, um huh. I certainly can recommend the area having been up here on two business trips. (laugh) Let me just double check. I wanted to ask, who you actually work with at the Corps? Is it the local dam tenders; is it Remer office; are there people in St. Paul?

LS: Usually, usually the local dam tender or Jim Ruyak, which I meet him on occasion when he's here. I mean, we've got a good working relationship. We don't - no problems.

Int: Um hum. I just wondered if you know, what the point of contact was in terms of -?

LS: Yes, if there's something we want, we'll mention it to the local manager.

Int: And one other. Yeah. Again, this might be before your time, so I'm just asking, in case it's not. A lot of doing this kind of interviewing with people is to see where memory goes. Sometimes nowhere, but sometimes, somebody might have noticed something.

I happened to see an old map which showed the damtender's dwelling and the other outbuildings at, here at the Federal Dam site and the sign on the map was 'facilities available to be leased', which suggested to me that the Corps wasn't using the stuff itself at that moment in time. And I wondered if you'd ever in your time coming up here, or as a concession operator here, if you'd ever noticed the Corps facilities themselves, not the concessions, but the Corps dwellings and units being leased to anybody else?

LS: No, I never did recall any of the Corps property being leased outside of by the concessionaires.

Int: Now, it's my understanding that the damtenders don't live on the property anymore.

LS: No, they don't.

Int: Do you remember when that changed? Is that something you -

LS: That's when Ed Sunde retired.

Int: So, it was at that point that the new person got his own lodgings?

LS: Right.

Int: And that house just stands empty?

LS: It would be nice if the Corps would make a, make a historical site out of it of some kind.

Int: Apparently, there are all sorts of, you know, ideas under discussion for what might happen to it. I was just reading a report today which was looking at all of the damtenders' dwellings. And I don't think any decisions have been made. Do you think that people who visit here would kind of go visit a museum or historical facility -?

LS: Definitely, they would; I am sure of it. A lot of the people that come up here, there is always a certain amount of people that have children, a large family and maybe they got a small boat and staying in the campground. Well, it'd be interesting for the parents to take their children through, and even people who don't have children to see some of the history of the area. Just like their, like Battle Point, and uh they are making a historical, well, a historical site that they are going to do more about advertising the fact.

Int: And who runs Battle Point? Is that the -

LS: Oh, Battle Point was the last engagement of the US Calvary with the Indians.

Int: I know that there was a battle there. Who -

LS: Yes, that was the last engagement.

Int: Is that, who, uh, is that the Leech Lake Indian Reservation, or is that the state?

LS: That is the State Historical Society site, right.

Int: In fact, I have an article about it with me just to bone up on it. How do people remember that around here? That battle, I mean, what -?

LS: Well, it's been passed down from generation to generation, like your Indians will pass it on down to their children.

Int: What about, I mean, how is it remembered? How did you get the story? What did people tell you about it when you came visiting or -?

LS: I didn't get the full story on it until later, because there wasn't that much about it. But I talked to some of the Indians, some of them have passed on since then.

Int: What did, I am real curious just to, if you would tell me the story they told you, so that I could, I am very interested in, in just what people remember.

LS: Well, just that, that they had such a pitched battle there. And of course, the calvary won. It's, you know, they would talk about maybe their grandparents or rather parents or something would tell stories about it, you know, about the fights and so on. Like my wife and myself, in particular, we've had a very good relationship with the Leech Lake Indian tribe. In fact, a lot of times when they had dignitaries would come to talk over and discuss different problems. A lot of times they would go out fishing with us, including the chief.

Int: How did you get to know the Indian people in this neighborhood?

LS: Well, we just associated with them through different functions that were going on. Like they'd have the different function, maybe a spaghetti dinner or something out at Sugar Point, put on by the Indians or something like that. My wife would go to it, and then, of course, the Leech Lake Alliance, that's recent years.

Int: I don't know what that is.

LS: Well, that's uh, uh, different businesses and people getting together with the Indians, figuring out their problems, sitting

down and figuring them out instead of trying to get everything done through the Legislature. Trying to figure out what we want for the both of us. Which is very good.

Int: I'm just curious. It's one of the areas that I am asking people about. It's one of the things I was going to ask you about, until you brought it up.

LS: Leech Lake Alliance?

Int: Well, how well you knew the Leech Lake community, and what your knowledge, and just kind of -?

LS: Well, I'm sure if you asked, on Leech Lake, this area here, if you ask any of the Indians, I would guess that 90% of them know my wife and myself. Like a lot, most of them come down to our place. Of course, I shouldn't be maybe saying they come to our place and they are going to go fishing and buy nightcrawlers or minnows and so on. Yeah, we're pretty well acquainted. Then we get along fine with them. It's a good relationship.

Int: It seems that many people do, and many people don't around here, so I'm just -.

LS: Yeah, well, I go hunting with a lot of them. And, in fact, Lucy is working here right now. Her husband is Indian, and I've hunted with him; he calls me the buck-killer.

Int: The bug killer?

LS: Buck.

Int: Oh, (laugh) Well. That's a nice name to have, you must have done a good job?

(Tape 2)

Int: Any recipe or any particular sense of why your family has made fast friendships with the Indian community here?

LS: Well, I believe you got to try to understand any of their problems and be respectful of other people's feelings. And by the same token, they have to respect your thoughts and feelings, which I think makes a good recipe for understanding.

Int: Do you have any sense that your family's experience is unusual, getting to know people in the reservation community, or is it quite common around here?

LS: I don't know. I believe, I can be wrong, but I believe we have a better relationship than any of the other concessionaires.

Int: Hum, is the a -?

LS: I mean, ah, not to say that they don't, you understand, what I mean, just to say that we are acquainted with so many of the Leech Lake tribe.

Int: Does that, did that come about largely through the Alliance, or - ?

LS: No, that's, most of it was previous. Like I say, my wife went to different functions, Indian functions. She got acquainted with them, through the different functions. It's been a good relationship.

Int: What about the Corps itself? One thing that I've picked up doing research for this project is that there seems, in years past, to have been a great concern about water levels on the reservoirs and a lot of back and forth about that. Does that still happen?

LS: Well, I've heard that there had been in regards to wild rice, and I think they felt that if the water level was too high or too low or something that'd affect the wild rice. I heard that years ago.

Int: But are there points of contention now with the Corps in terms of the community that you notice?

LS: Not that I know of. I think that as far as the community is concerned, we all have good relationship with the Corps. I'm talking about the town besides the concessionaires. I think there is a good relationship.

Int: I'm just curious because um I didn't know, I didn't think about it before I started doing this research for this particular project. But the Corps of Engineers is not loved every place it goes. And I know there has been a history of conflict over wild rice levels and over flooding years ago in the Headwaters. And I don't find any, I have not found anything particular, in more recent years, but I wondered if there was anything that I should know about, or the Corps should, for that matter.

LS: Well, offhand, I can't see anything where there's any conflict at the present time. Ah, like I say, we're all, as far as I'm concerned, we have good relationship between ourselves and the Corps.

Int: Is there any advantage to the Corps landing, financially in terms of other -? Does it cost you any less to do business, because of the way the facilities are organized? Or is that not an issue, in terms of the -?

LS: Oh, I don't see where it's much of an issue. We have to pay taxes on, personal property taxes on the buildings and so forth. So, in actuality, when it comes down to it when you pay for the lease and personal property taxes all, I don't think there'd be much difference between that and owning land someplace.

Int: It's more, would it be fair to say it's more the location than the terms that are particularly attractive about the Federal Dam landing?

LS: Well, actually, the location is nice. Ah, you don't get the blend of the storms, that is, the water action of the storms, as you would out on the lake.

Int: And of course, it's a road that a lot of people go through so -

LS: Right.

Int: So they would see the sign just from Highway 8 that -?

LS: That is correct.

Int: Do other people ever give the concessionaires who have landing rights there a hard time, or is that -, or are you all in it together?

LS: No, like I say, like we advertise this area as an association, Federal Dam Area Recreation Association, Battle Point Lodge, Sugar Point, North Star, Leech Lake Campground. Well, we got a billboard down near Princeton. I don't know whether you've seen it or not.

Int: I saw the big one that says 'Great fishing starts in Federal Dam'.

LS: Yes. Well, we had that put up a year ago and -

Int: It's very noticeable.

LS: We leased it for 3 years. And I'm not positive, but I think that had quite a bit to do with the amount of people that were in this area this last summer. I think it had quite a bit to do with it, besides, of course, our other promotionals.

Int: Um huh.

LS: But I think that was a big factor.

Int: Now do you put out some kind of -

LS: Brochures.

Int: Brochures. Maybe you could mail me one or I could, I would love to have one just for my research files. Cause I've seen some of the ones that have been done in this area, but not one for Federal Dam recently. I would really like to have that.

LS: Okay.

Int: Okay.

LS: Sure.

Int: Let me stop this. I don't want to -. Unless there's anything I've mentioned that you would want to follow up on. Is there something, some thought that you would want to complete?

LS: Not that I can think of, offhand.

Int: Okay.

U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS, ST. PAUL DISTRICT

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW FORM

Narrator Name: James T. von Lorenz

Address: 4332 Brookside Avenue, Minneapolis, MN 55436

Date of Interview: 12-10-87

Place of Interview: 4332 Brookside Avenue

Name of Interviewer: Jo Blatti

Project Title (if any): Headwaters

Narrator Biographical Information:

Full name (including maiden name): James Theodore von Lorenz

Year of Birth: 1905

Spouse's full name: _____

Subjects Discussed:

Mr. von Lorenz discusses work in the construction office of the Corps of Engineers, St. Paul District from 1930s until retirement in 1972.

Subjects discussed include 1930s work with the Minnesota Department of Highways and the Forestry Service, various construction work for the Corps in metro area, the Headwaters and downriver on the locks and dams. In terms of the Headwaters, Mr. von Lorenz gives a general overview of the recreation development, including initial land use assessment, the Indian mounds at Gull, the roles of design and construction people in St. Paul, expresses support for Corps recreational development on its own land as distinct from local lessors.

TAPE RECORDING:

No. of Cassettes: 1 No. of Reels & Speed: _____

Length of Interview: 60 minutes

Release form signed (date): 12-10-87

Restrictions (if any): -0-

Comments:

NOTE: Mr. von Lorenz is somewhat deaf. Many transitions on the tape are partial pick-ups on the questions asked. Not a great deal of detail generally.

TRANSCRIPT:

Date completed: February 1988 No. of Pages: 17

Restrictions (if any): -0-

Comments:

TAPE INDEX
Corps/Mississippi Headwaters Interviews, Series II
Interview with James von Lorenz
December 10, 1987
(1 hour)

Tape 1, side 1

- 0 min. von Lorenz notes University of Minnesota start late 1920s, left school for lack of money.
- Depression-era work for [MN] Dept. of Highways, highway grading and locating, wintertime work in design for "master highway program" based on European models.
- 5 mins. Switch to Forest Service work Montana, wife didn't like that.
- Back to Minnesota Highway Dept. and then to Corps of Engineers, dredging near lower St. Anthony Falls station and various posts in metro area and downriver.
- 10 mins. Notes his pleasure in working conditions and supervisory.
- Notes unusual dredge from Lake Michigan.
- von Lorenz shifted downriver again while design for metro area upper lock completed, family stayed in Minneapolis.
- Repairs to dams in Headwaters area, 1930s and 1940s.
- 15 mins. Story of coal barge that hooked onto Ford Dam, describes repairs, unusual hollow construction of dam.
- Family camping vacations and subsequent assignment to help develop recreational land use ideas for Headwaters.
- Remembers Cross Lake as first campground developed, Sandy, Leech and Pokegama in succession.
- Recreational development funded through leftover year-end funds, at first.
- 22 mins. Describes Indian mounds at Gull Lake, development of recreational facilities with Fitzpatrick, Indian concerns that burial ground respected.

Most Corps contemporaries retired now, too; now military engineers all strangers.

Tape 1, side 2

- 0 min. Notes distinction between recreation and damtending, difference manual labor and management.
- Story of personnel officer who let him work past 65.
- 5 mins. Retirement, wife enjoyed it, shouldn't I.
- Describes construction office, how arrangements to build new facilities worked.
- Indicates that there was little interplay between St. Paul and Chicago or Omaha offices on recreation development.
- Describes war work in Omaha.
- How Corps staff would rough out recreation facilities.
- 10 mins. Just can't turn contractor loose -
- House builders, etc. handled major construction in Headwaters, each had separate contract
- Roles of design section and construction in developing recreational facilities.
- Notes importance of Corps development as distinct local citizenry, sees this as question of responsibility, knowing exactly what the organization is getting for its money.
- Difficulty of getting land prepared properly.
- 20 mins. Describes hydraulics of annual draw down.
- Speaks of Owen Emsweiler and Wes Walters, Ft. Snelling offices for Corps early years of von Lorenz' career.
- 25 mins. 1961 question of local control Headwaters, von Lorenz opposed.

U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS, ST. PAUL DISTRICT

ORAL HISTORY AGREEMENT FORM

I, James von Lorenz, a participant in
an oral history interview recorded on Dec. 10, 1987,
hereby give and deliver to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, St. Paul
District all the incidents of ownership in that interview, including
copyright, from this time forward.

Signed:

Date 12.10.87

James von Lorenz
Donor

4332 Brookside Ave
Address Wynneopolis, Ind. 46436

Signed:

CO Ratti
Interviewer

Interview with James von Lorenz
December 10, 1987
Corps/Mississippi Headwaters Project

Tape One Side One

Int. Thursday, December 10, 1987. I am Jo Blatti interviewing James von Lorenz for the Corps of Engineers Headwaters Project.

von Lorenz Well, actually I worked out of the District Office, but I was in charge of the whole thing, so I guess you are right. We will let it go.

Int. Alright. Let me ask how you began to work for the Corps of Engineer.

von Lorenz Oh yeah, sure.

Int. I mean, how did you get to the Corps itself in the first place?

von Lorenz Oh yeah, that's quite a story behind that.

Int. Go ahead and tell it to me.

von Lorenz Well, I was - I graduated from high school and started the University.

Int. Is this here in St. Paul?

von Lorenz Yeah, the University of Minnesota. But it was pretty rough going about that time. It was the big trouble with the - the whole country was in an upset.

Int. What year was this, Mr. von Lorenz?

von Lorenz That was in the '20s. As I say, I got - it just happened that I was over in St. Paul on some business of my father's and stopped in a restaurant. And here there were three or four fellows that I had gone to the University with and they were still going and I was on my, I think, my second year and -. But I told them I didn't have anymore money to go on and what was I going to do? Well, one of them said, well, why don't you come get a job with us. They were working for the Department of Highways and I said, are they hiring? I guess so. So anyway, I was just picking up odd jobs in the meantime. So I went over and stopped in and saw the head of the personnel there and he

cross-examined me about what my background was and all this and that. And finally, he said, well, he said, if you want to go to work for us, why ok. So I went to work for the Department of Highways. That was in - that was during the Depression, it was just about in the middle then.

And so, first thing they did, they sent me up to Wheaton, which is up in the northwest part of the state, and then I was down along the Mississippi on what was Highway 10, I guess it was. Anyway, we were doing some grading work and then paving the following year. And we finished that up, and I came in the office in that fall of the year. And I was in on the design. That was the first time they were talking about this master highway program. Some of the engineers from the government had been in Europe on a convention and saw how the Germans were building their big freeways, and they'd wanted to know why we couldn't. So, we started working on those and I stayed there all winter and - .

Int. So, this was design work that you were doing?

von Lorenz Pardon.

Int. You were designing?

von Lorenz I was designing then, yes. And then, we - then we had work up in this metropolitan area then and - . So we started in on Highway 12 that runs from Minneapolis out to Wayzata and then out to the state line, and we worked on that on three different occasions. And we worked on what is now Highway 100, both south of here and north of here. And in the wintertime, they wouldn't let us come in. It was location. It was quite a program at that time, and we did locating of highways. And then we would turn our information into the office. And we were in Robbinsdale, and we were out to Waconia. And oh, where else was they? We just jumped around.

And then, the, how was that, oh, that was when the Forest Service was looking for fellows with some engineering background to go to Montana. They had some problem with the standing timber out there, and it was almost the Canadian line. But they didn't give us too much of a background. So, anyway, it sounded interesting to me. So I said, sure. The engineering on the state, they never went very strong on that, because I was doing a pretty good job with the boys I had in my section. But I just wanted to get away; I

just guess I wasn't an office person. So, I said I would go and there were three or four others that also did. But it just didn't - . My wife didn't like it; let's put it that way. She was living in Missoula, Montana and I was living in a tent along with a crew almost into Canada. And in the winter we came into Missoula, and she did not like it. And she wasn't going to stay. You take a Norwegian, they can get bullheaded. But anyhow, I called the office and came on back. So anyway, I didn't like the work at that time. I don't remember why it was.

Int. This is the Highway Department?

von Lorenz The Highway Department. So, I talked to some more of the boys that I had run into at one time or another. And they were with the Corps and they said well, why don't you come down and talk to them. And it was a fellow by the name of oh, oh, oh. Well, it makes no difference, he was an Assistant Chief of the Engineering Section. And so he - , he wanted my background and we sat and talked for awhile and he said, oh, what do you know about dredging? And, I said, I know some. I said, I've seen it being done. I lived right along on the river so I could see what was going on. Well, he said we are looking for somebody that we can send over and do some work on the Mississippi.

Int. Is this the -

von Lorenz Over by the University.

Int. Oh, it's not the 9-foot channel, it's over here

von Lorenz Well, no. It was this lock and dam structure that finally went in there. [the lower St. Anthony Falls hydroelectric station collapsed into the river, December 1987]

Int. Right, quite recently.

von Lorenz So, they had a trailer out there for an office and a telephone, lights and all that. So they said, you go out there and take over. And then we were dredging from the Ford Dam clear up to the falls.

Int. This is St. Anthony Falls?

von Lorenz St. Anthony Falls, yeah. And so, that was good and then I got shifted away from there. I went various places. I went down river. I went to the Ford Dam on a couple of occasions, one whole winter, a

couple parts of summers. And I just kind of moved around and - but I liked it. The people that I was working with and the supervisory were good people, reasonable, and so there was no reason not to like it, really. So then, there was a time delay, I suppose you would call it, between when we finished the dredging. In fact, they brought a dredge in from Lake Michigan through, down the river and then up the Mississippi, and big, old dredge. I'd never seen one like that before, but it was interesting to watch them work. And so then, they hadn't completed all the design for the upper lock, and so I was shifted down river and oh, where else. I got moving around, anyway.

Int. Now when you were working down the Mississippi did you -

von Lorenz Down the Mississippi as far as Guttenberg, Iowa.

Int. Did your family stay here, or did they move?

von Lorenz No, family stayed right here. In the meantime, we had bought this place back again, and the family was here. And so then, they, oh, then they started working on the lock, and I was, how was that? It - oh, I was doing some rehabilitating work to some of the structures up at the Headwaters, and that's how I kind of got acquainted up there.

Int. Do you remember when this would have been?

von Lorenz Pardon.

Int. Would this have been in the '30s, the '40s or - ?

von Lorenz Oh, no. That must have been in the at least the '40s. I don't think it was any later than that.

Int. So they were doing repairs to the dams or to - ?

von Lorenz Yeah, I think that was about the time. And then, I came back and was assigned to this upper lock structure for awhile. Then they wanted me to go down river and they - we had some -

Int. May I ask a question?

von Lorenz Pardon?

Int. Uppper lock means Lock No. 3?

von Lorenz No, no. Let's see Lock No. 3 would be Hastings.

Int. Oh, ok.

Von Lorenz You see, and 1 is by the Ford Dam, 2 was Hastings and 3 was Red Wing.

Int. Where is the Upper Lock then? I guess I am -

Von Lorenz Well, that is what they called the Upper Lock, that's the same one that is up by St. Anthony Falls.

Int. Oh, ok.

Von Lorenz You see, that was new, so then they couldn't give it a number. So they just called it the Upper Lock.

Int. I see, I see.

Von Lorenz And there was work down there at the, oh on a couple of the different structures for the next couple of years, I guess it was. And then one winter, things were kind of quiet. I had been assigned to the Ford Dam again, No. 1. And a dredge, no, not a dredge, but a tow barge, excuse me, a barge had broken loose in Minneapolis at the dock there and came down, loaded with coal, and came down and got hooked on the top of the Ford Dam. Finally they got it off, but they were a little concerned about what the condition would be, whether it would hold or not.

So, I spent - I was assigned down there and we filled the inside. It was a hollow structure. The Ford Dam was unusual that way. It was hollow. There was a walkway right through it and there were lights in it and - , but they were a little concerned that with this impact of this scow with coal, it could have damaged it. So we spent, oh, how long a time was it? They came down on the - what would be the east shore, and there was a road coming down. And they docked in there, and then they backed their trucks in and dumped coarse gravel. And we dumped and we dumped and we dumped. And finally, they felt that, oh, I don't remember how many feet in height this fill was before it was determined that it was enough. They felt that it was stable then.

What happened to me then? Oh, in the meantime, I was - I had gotten a couple of summers of vacation and we had gone camping. And somehow or other, it got out at the office that I knew something about camps and all of that. And I had already made a couple of tours through the Headwaters gauging what

the possibility was of using extra land that the government owned. You see, when they built the dam, the so-called pool or water level was raised so they - instead of just buying a strip of land, they'd buy a whole farm. And we had this extra land. So if - I think, if I remember rightly, one of the officials from the Chief's office in Washington was out here and I had been sometime in the office and - . Or was I called in from the field - I don't just remember how that went. But anyway, they questioned me about the possibility of we using that land for some purpose. And why not make a campsite out of it, and anything like that. So, gosh, I thought, well that makes some sense to me. So, I said sure. So anyway, the Assistant Chief and I took a whole week, and we toured the whole Headwater area and looked at these area sites. And I kind of gave him an idea of what my thinking was, so it seemed to be reasonable to him. So he went back, and he said sure, we'll do it. And that started this Headwater program.

Int. Do you remember when that was? Was it - ?

Von Lorenz I just - being away from the site, 15 years and you see, then, I got away from the recreation area there, too, toward the end.

Int. Oh, I see.

Von Lorenz Yeah, they assigned - when these places were built while I was there. But then when they were starting to be put in use, they had an individual in charge of each site, and there was no reason for me to be there or around there anymore as far as that goes. So, I don't know. Oh, I think I was down along the river. I think we were stationed at Winona that year, no, Lake City first. I jumped all the way down from the Minneapolis area on these areas that I mentioned before and stopped at - did I get involved in Hastings? Oh, I guess there was something in Hastings, too, in the dam there. But then, of course, every spring the river flooded, and we were taken off whatever we were doing and sent on flood control. I've got some certificates hanging on the wall in there complimenting the work we did on the river on the floods. And -

Int. Could I ask a little bit about how the campgrounds were built? Was this after World War II?

Von Lorenz The which?

Int. The campgrounds.

Von Lorenz Well, the first one built was at Cross Lake, and that was before - . Let's see, was that before or was that after? Gosh, I - downstairs, I've got a box of papers down there, and I was looking through some. I couldn't find what I was looking for. I don't greatly recall. You see, there was three years that I was gone during the war, and they. But they. No. Cross Lake was built before then.

Int. It was?

Von Lorenz The first what we called, the first stage, it was just a rough-in campsite. You could put up either a tent or bring a trailer in and that was the only one. And then after the - , then there was no more of that. And then, they came back and after the war was over, and the Chief's office would have money in the spring they didn't know what to do with, so they would send it to us, use it for campgrounds.

Int. I see.

Von Lorenz It worked out quite well. And let's see, I think that, I was just trying to recall the order that they went in. I think it was Sandy Lake that was built next. They - that was a small one, though. There wasn't much to it. And then we went over to Leech Lake, and there we had some acreage. We had a beautiful site on the south shore of Leech Lake for dockage, and I think even the kids used to swim there. We had good campsites. We drilled a well and had water. But there was no - the first couple of years at least, there wasn't any electricity to the various sites. But, and then, from there we went, I think, Pokegama, I think, was next, and that was just a small thing along the shore. It didn't amount to much.

Int. Now, did you get to know the damtenders?

Von Lorenz Well, the damtenders were in charge of the recreation areas, of the smaller ones. But the larger ones, they had a special individual in charge of the recreation part, and - because they was getting alot of use. They just seemed to like them very much.

Int. Did you actually go up and help build them?

Von Lorenz Well, no, by that time, [clock strikes] I was to some extent in the office, and kind of advisor, if

you want to call it that, or suggesting about how we would do it. And it seemed to come out pretty well. And then we went to Gull Lake, and that was a nice area, and there was - . After we had gone in there, I had seen these humps of dirt, and I wondered about them - and I thought, could they be Indian mounds? And - but I wasn't sure and I didn't know just what - . [Telephone rings]

Int. So you suspected you might have some Indian mounds at Gull Lake?

Von Lorenz [Digresses about telephone call]
But anyway, when we got to Winni, there we had another nice site, well wooded and high and dry. But there was no the lake at Winni was on the other side of the road, and the dam had been built with a road on top of it. So, it was still possible to get the use of the water and the fishing and stay in this campgrounds. And then, I think the last one, oh gosh, that was about it, I guess.

Int. You started, when the phone rang, you were starting to tell me about the Indian mounds at Gull Lake.

Von Lorenz Oh, at Gull.

Int. And, you said that -

Von Lorenz Then, at that time, Fitzpatrick, who had been down the river at one of the dams, didn't like it, and he got transferred up and he was at Cross Lake for some time. And then when I had a repair job on Gull Lake, too, and I got to know Fitzpatrick quite well. And between the two of us, I think the two of us talked it over and walked over it and studied it and decided it would make a swell campground. But, I said, what about these lumps up near that end? Well, he said, I'll tell you, I said, I think I know what it is, but I won't say until we find out for sure. So, he said meet me here in the morning, and we will take a drive up, and we will find out. And we were informed that they were Indian mounds. Indian burial and they had been - the surface had been disturbed, but the bodies were still, what was left of them, were still there. A few bones, I suppose, and they did not want them disturbed. Absolutely not.

Int. Now, did you talk this over with Indians who lived in the area or with an archeologist or - ?

Von Lorenz No, it was an Indian. It was an Indian. He didn't

go into too much detail; his father had been, I don't know, his father or grandfather or somebody had been a Chief at one time. And I don't know who, but it wasn't, no I don't think it was, I was just trying to analyze whether it was over an acre in size, I don't think so. Seemed to me it wasn't. They used it for some and then they stopped. So we left it undisturbed, and we worked all around it, and we put in water and we put in - . I think we brought in light off the highway, that was a power line that ran up, and they had, oh, I don't know maybe a mile of line to put in. And we fixed that up, and that was as far as I can recall unless they have done some since. Why they may have enlarged some, they may have. But I don't think we had any more locations that could be used, that the Corps owned unless they bought some. And I don't think they did. I never heard of it being done.

Int. Now, were there other people in the St. Paul office who worked with you on this?

Von Lorenz Gee, I don't recall. I would have to really sit down and think back. I think that most of those people are retired, too. See, that was - . I left there in 1972, and some of them had retired already. So I think they are probably all gone, because I was over to the office - . I still am a member of the military engineers' organization over there, and they meet at the Athletic Club, and I think about 95%, if not more, are all strangers.

So I don't think I could recall that there were any that I had anything to do with during this recreational program.

Tape One Side Two

Int. So, am I right to think that your office, it was kind of you working with the damtenders on this recreation stuff? Where did the orders come from?

Von Lorenz They didn't do anything at all until the thing was all completed. And then they, I don't think, no, that the damtenders, after a couple of years, I think at the most, they were kept on as damtenders, but not anything to do with recreation. They brought in an extra person just for the summer season, and I think that was the way all of them were. They, let's see at Pokegama, Sharp may have been, but, you see, there wasn't anything that couldn't be done that needed doing during the winter months. Up in that country, when it snows, you stay away from it. So they - , and then

you stay away from it. So they - , and then they, and even now, I think, they find something for them to do in the office, somewhere in this metropolitan area.

Int. Well, my understanding is that the damtenders themselves used to, before the dams were mechanized, there was a fair amount to do in the winter, just to keep things operating. I suppose that's -

von Lorenz Well, you see, now you take at the, at Cross Lake, was that finally electrified or was - ? They had the lift gates. I know I spent one whole summer up there putting in some more new gates and that stuff. And, of course, the damtender had enough work to keep him busy and not having to get involved in this recreational part of it, the people coming and going and that sort of thing.

Int. Did the damtenders talk about that with you when you were up there, or was that St. Paul?

von Lorenz Well, sure. I felt that it was only a sociable, sensible thing, that if they had something that they wanted to either complain about or maybe improve on it - being there all the time, you see, they couldn't help but see how it was going. And they would, instead of going into the office, I'd come up through there, oh, I'd -, maybe once a month, take a week and go through the whole area and visit all the men and find out if they had any problems and try to straighten them out and all of that.

Int. Would this be in the summer months only, that you would go up or - ?

von Lorenz Yes. No, there was no reason for me to go up there during the wintertime at all. In fact, the recreation areas were shut down. There was no use made of them during the winter months. Not that I can recall.

Int. Were you , how many years did you work in recreation? Do you remember?

von Lorenz Oh, gosh, I don't remember when I first got involved in that recreational part of it. Gosh, I don't think I can go back that far in my memory and try to recall when it was.

Int. Were you working in recreation when you retired in the '70s?

Von Lorenz Well, you see, the retirement age was 65, and there was a Jewish fellow Abel Silverman, very nice guy, though, a good square shooter and he, as long as person could do their work, their health was good, why they would let them continue. So I think I kept on 'til I was 68. And then, my wife was a schoolteacher in Minneapolis and she had retired and she was enjoying it, but she said, what good is it that you keep on working? So I just decided, well, I don't know, I'm getting on in years anyway. So I, at the first of July in '72, why I retired.

Int. Ok, alright. Now did you - were there other - , did you know other people in other district offices who worked in recreation? Did you see them and talk over stuff?

Von Lorenz No, at first the only other offices that they would have would be construction offices. And, usually, if it was construction work in a recreation area, we would send, either I would be down there if things were going smoothly elsewhere. Or, we would have one of the boys go down there just for the duration of the construction work. And then - so it worked out quite well that way.

Int. How many - ? Were there four or five people working with you on construction in St. Paul or - ?

Von Lorenz Well, it depends. Some jobs, I would be alone. Sometimes there would maybe be a survey crew with me, and so it wasn't any fixed program, really. It was just what the conditions were.

Int. Now, did you know people who were doing the same kind of work that you were in St. Louis or some other Corps office?

Von Lorenz No.

Int. No, you just -

Von Lorenz No, you see, the closest Corps office was either Chicago or Omaha. And Chicago was our division office. There were several districts under their supervision and Omaha was not. Actually, we had nothing between us. But I, when I left the Corps on leave, why I went with the Omaha District in military work, and. But I came right back as soon, in '45. And they called the Corps office here in St. Paul and said they were sending me back, so I came back to - .

Int. Was that war work or something that you were doing?

Von Lorenz Yeah, yeah.

Int. So, you didn't go overseas, but you were reassigned in this country.

Von Lorenz No, no. I was on military construction. Airbases, all types of buildings and things of that nature that they had to have somebody that was familiar with the construction work there all the time.

Int. Now, did you get involved, were you mainly involved in the construction of recreation facilities or did you get involved what happened there, or regulations about it?

Von Lorenz No, we would rough about what we wanted. How many campsites and about, just roughly, try to outline pretty well what the whole program would be. Because there were roads that had to be built, and then there were these little inshoots, as we called them, just a little drive in, back into an area, large enough to put up a tent or bring in a trailer or something like that. And we usually have one fellow, after we got the thing pretty well set on what we wanted and did some staking out, so they could see just exactly what they were going to do. You just can't turn a contractor loose without giving him some instructions. And so we'd have one fellow there usually that would stay while it was being built. About that time, they would decide with the way it was being used that we would have to have somebody there in charge all the time. So they changed the program then, and I actually had very little to do with it after it once got in operation.

Int. Ok. When you were building the sites, did you have people in say, the Headwaters area, be the contractors?

Von Lorenz No, oh yes, sure private individuals. House builders. There might be as many as two or three. Maybe we'd have some buildings that have to go up, and then, often, there was water to bring in and lights. See, each one had a separate contractor. That way we could keep the local people happy, too, by giving them something to do.

Int. Now, did you make up your own plans and designs or - ?

Von Lorenz No, alot of it was made up. We would sit down in

the office and talk it over. And then we had part of the design section that would rough it in, and then we'd sit down and criticize it or examine it and maybe suggest changes here and there. But usually, the boys that were doing it were pretty knowledgeable after a few of them. They knew just about what was required.

Int. Now, were these engineers who worked in the office or were they - ?

Von Lorenz Well, they were - just what their titles were - they were in what we called a Design Section. That was it. They might have a couple of different groups; maybe one group would be doing nothing but this recreation planning and somebody would be something else and do it that way.

Int. I see, so somebody might be designing a new lock for something and somebody else would be designing -

Von Lorenz That's right. So it was rather than have one big crew and then everybody work on the same thing, why they'd cut it down into smaller groups, and I think it was more effective. Because these fellows, if after they designed one or so, they had a pretty good idea just what was required. And so we - no, I was well satisfied with the way the designs come out. We had no problems.

Int. Now, when you said that these fellows would work up some designs, and you all sit around and talk about how, you know, make some comments and criticisms, who else would do that? People from operations and hydraulics or - ?

Von Lorenz No, just design and construction.

Int. Ok, ok.

Von Lorenz And we felt that the, and I, actually, I was assigned to the, well, it was the operations section which was, oh, what is, we had a group that they could throw in anywhere if they felt it necessary.

Int. Now, I was talking to Mr. Walters earlier this week.

Von Lorenz Oh, yeah, Wes? Oh, he's a good man.

Int. Yeah, and he was saying that when all of, some of this came up about recreation, he suggested that

the local people do it and that the Corps not get involved at all. He wasn't sure that it was the Corps' place to build these campgrounds. Did you have thoughts about that or - ?

Von Lorenz Oh, I wasn't in favor of that. I was not in favor of it, because it was on government land to start with, and it was government money was available. Otherwise, if we hadn't gotten this in the late winter, get this money from the Chief's office. Why that, you see, if they didn't use it before the first of July, they had to turn it back and they didn't want to turn money back. That hurt them. So we would have the same idea, I think the way we all had then, that, let's as long as it is our land, let's build on it ourselves and we know what we are getting. So, that seemed to be pretty much the approach all the way through.

Int. So, there might have been some disagreement, but in fact - ?

Von Lorenz The thing was that if we could have, I suppose, turned it over to maybe a local architect that he might be able to design some of it, maybe the buildings. But the grounds, the grounds, you have to get that all in shape first before you do any building, and we couldn't find anybody that we felt was able to do that whole thing. And we had our contract section. We had our own design section and we kept our boys busy and all of that, and it was better for us.

Int. Now, did you get to know any of the local people who ran resorts or who ran the fish guides or the concessions up when you were doing construction?

Von Lorenz Not too much, no. Actually, we didn't call a meeting with them and tell them what we were going to do.

Int. You didn't?

Von Lorenz No, not that I ever sat in with. I felt it was entirely our doing and what our result was a Corps project and I think that they got the idea that maybe these guys are alright after all.

Int. Was there some -

Von Lorenz We had no problems with them. No, it was good that way.

Int. There wasn't any resentment of the campgrounds?

Von Lorenz No, not that I ever heard. None that was ever thrown at me, anyway. And these other people from the Corps office, some of the other officials were curious what we were doing and they wanted to see what it was turning out. And they could stop and talk to these local people, and they felt that things were going along alright.

Int. I guess I am just curious. It just occurred to me to ask that. The only thing people have ever talked to me about is water levels, and apparently there was always a great deal upset about water levels.

Von Lorenz I think that the Hydraulics Branch was the ones that took care of the water level, and the dam-tender as we called them, the fellow in charge of this dam structure would always call in and give the water level elevation and then they would determine how much is necessary to draw it down and to keep it within a reasonable level. So not to flood people out and - . But most of the places that I can recall were up fairly well above the water level, even in the spring. But we just didn't want to antagonize anybody and there was no reason to. I mean, we had the people there, we had everything was in working order and if it wasn't, why during the summer months when the so called pool as we called it was level and stationary, why we could go in if we had work to do, we would do it. Get it ready for - because in the fall of the year, it was a practice even in the Mississippi of drawing the water level down. And so during the spring and the spring thaw and before maybe the flow starts, this water could come up.

We have it right here in this little creek, runs along the bank, just this backyard of ours gets under water almost every spring. They built a new dam up at the Headwater, up at the lake which controls it. It was funny when I stop and think of explaining how the Corps handled their flood waters in the spring. In the fall, they had this drawing down of the pool to a certain level and then in the spring, why watch it. Because I know several times we had it so high out here that they couldn't do anything with it. Because on the river we always had plenty of big gates, those big flood gates that we could raise and run the water through.

Int. Yeah. Let me look at my little list and see if there are any questions that I didn't think to ask. [Pause] Do you remember a man named Owen Emsweiler?

von Lorenz Sure, I know Emsweiler.

Int. Do you know where he is now?

von Lorenz I think he has been dead for years.

Int. I wondered. I wondered.

von Lorenz I am sure he is.

Int. His name is one that some of the damtenders remembered when I interviewed them.

von Lorenz Well, you can call Wes Walters, I think he might maybe know him better than I do. Because Emsweiler was in the office all the time. And, but you know, years ago, the Corps' office was out at Fort Snelling.

Int. Oh. Now, when you were working there?

von Lorenz When I started.

Int. This would have been in the '30s?

von Lorenz We was there for just a couple of years, and then we moved into the Post Office Building.

Int. I didn't know that.

von Lorenz Yeah.

Int. I just came from Fort Snelling this morning.

von Lorenz Yeah. We had a building there. No, I think that Wes Walters would probably be - to my recollection would probably be the best one that would know, because there is others that, there aren't many of them that are living that could really tell you anything about it. But Wes is still going good.

Int. Now, I talked with him and I forgot to ask him about Mr. Emsweiler, though. Was he a military man?

von Lorenz No, I don't think so.

Int. No, he was a civilian engineer.

Von Lorenz No, I don't think he was. No. I never did know whether Wes Walters had any military service or not.

Int. I don't think so. I asked him.

Von Lorenz I don't recall that I ever heard one way or the other about him.

Int. Yeah, yeah. Let me, one other thing I was curious about, was I was reading just in looking over all this stuff at the Corps office.

 [Laughs]

Von Lorenz Stuff is right. I know what you mean.

Int. That in 1961 the Minnesota Legislature got real interested in the Headwaters and in whether the dams should be locally controlled rather than controlled by the Corps of Engineers, and I wondered if you remembered anything about that, or if that was anything that had come to your attention?

Von Lorenz I think that had all been settled by then, and it was determined that it was Corps property. The Corps built and the Corps was responsible for the condition of the water, that is, the level that they were going to control it. And the state had nothing to do with it, and apparently, it was agreeable because that's the way it's been ever since.

Int. Is there anything that I have kind of reminded you of that you would want to talk to me about. Sometimes when I interview people I feel like I ought to give them a chance to talk back.

Von Lorenz I think we covered quite an area. I can't think of anything else.

Int. Well, let me turn it off then.

U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS, ST. PAUL DISTRICT

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW FORM

Narrator Name: J. Wesley Walters

Address: 1288 No. Victoria, St. Paul, MN

Date of Interview: 12-8-87

Place of Interview: 1288 No. Victoria

Name of Interviewer: Jo Blatti

Project Title (if any): Headwaters interviews, series II

Narrator Biographical Information:

Full name (including maiden name): John Wesley Walters

Year of Birth: June 24, 1905

Spouse's full name: Josephine Perrill Walters

Subjects Discussed:

Mr. Walters discusses his career as a civilian engineer with the St. Paul District, US Army Corps of Engineers, circa 1930 to 1965; he was responsible for Headwaters Reservoirs operations from 1932 through the 1950s. Subjects discussed include communication between dams and St. Paul office; Depression era public works; policies concerning operations and maintenance of dwellings, outbuildings and officer quarters at dam facilities; personnel in Headwaters and St. Paul over time; water levels policy; public meetings in the Headwaters; use of officers quarters at the dams for personal recreation; liquor at Corps of Engineers sites.

TAPE RECORDING:

No. of Cassettes: 2 No. of Reels & Speed: _____

Length of Interview: 2 hrs.

Release form signed (date): 12-8-87

Restrictions (if any): -0-

Comments:

Clock ticking throughout. Mr. Walters' voice sinks quite low at times; he didn't seem comfortable with the microphone, taping aspect, in general. Mrs. Walters interjects comments at several points in the interview.

TRANSCRIPT:

Date completed: February 1988 No. of Pages: 38

Restrictions (if any): -0-

Comments:

Informant discussed several matters of personality conflict and office politics off-tape.

TAPE INDEX
Corps/Mississippi Headwaters Interviews, Series II
Interview with J. Wesley Walters by Jo Blatti
December 8, 1987
(2 hours)

Tape 1, side 1

- 0 min. Walter's training at MIT, 1st job at Bemis Bag in St. Louis, 1929.
- Depression as spur to follow-up on earlier Corps of Engineer exams.
- Offered several positions in several districts, chose St. Paul on reputation of engineer-in-charge.
- 308 reports, other studies in progress at that time.
- 7 mins. Responsibility for Headwaters in 1932, before paved roads almost. Describes damtenders' duties at that time, logbooks.
- Describes Depression-era repairs and "make-work" projects in Headwaters, his own inspection trips.
- Describes officers quarters at Headwaters dams, circumstances of construction when the original timber dams were rebuilt in concrete beginning ca. 1899.
- 9 mins. Describes snow-sampling, importance of spring melting patterns. 1950 flood at Sandy as an example of extreme conditions.
- Describes lockmasters' annual meetings, Walters' initiative in instituting ca. 1952.
- 18 mins. Development of recreation policies nationally, Walters' belief that local people should handle those projects.
- 25 mins. Describes Leech Lake boat liveries ca. 1935, 1936, lease actually administered by town of Federal Dam. Discusses town campground, boat operators' trip to St. Paul to discuss improvements.

Tape 1, side 2

- 0 min. Remembers people camping at Sandy somewhere in late '40s, 1950s.

- 5 mins. 1931 public hearing concerning proposed Mud Lake Dam.
Remembers Carl Anderson, damtender at Pokegama and Leech during WW II, floating bog incident at Leech in war years.
Damtending as a job.
- 12 mins. Story of complaint about high water at former army man's cabin.
Story of complaint at Whitefish Chain, prompt investigation as a practice
- 16 mins. Describes drought and low water during 1930s, formation of Water Level Improvement Associations in Headwaters as a response. Recounts his testimony in public hearings concerning minimum operating levels at each lake.
- 24 mins. Anecdote of resort-owner who built house on sand, discusses public attitudes about water levels.
- Tape 2, side 1
- 0 min. Walters notes that he had little contact with native Americans, damtenders had more.
Describes occasional family trips to Headwaters, more commonly travelled alone.
Recounts story of hurried return in response to St. Paul message, accused of spending too much on Headwaters business. His decision to avoid fishing while in the area.
- 6 mins. Memories of Deer River meeting about high water, George Rossman, editor of Grand Rapids Herald Review.
Other assignments in addition to Headwaters - small boat harbors, study of cycles in reservoir water levels.
- 15 mins. Describes employee at St. Paul Office 1930s, 1940s - brilliant, self-taught engineer.
1961 Minnesota legislature on operation of Headwaters Reservoirs, Walters' perspectives on the issue.
- 21 mins. Describes strong local feeling over water levels in 1930s, Forest Service employee's proposal that Corps turn over Winni.

Deer River hearings 1935, his own sympathy for community views, rainfall only solution.

25 mins. Walters' draft 1st recreation plan Mississippi River ca. 1940s.

Describes employee who was conservation-minded, always bitter Corps didn't take more into consideration.

Story boating accident Mississippi River, Walters' proposed safety measure adopted.

Tape 2, side 2

0 min. Recreation as more public use Headwaters dam sites.
Policies concerning dwellings at dams.

Story of extra funds at years end, solution to allocate toward outboards per immediate supervisor's wishes.

5 mins. Dwellings, paint up and fix up per families' wishes.
Change from on-site policy to live-out system at dams in recent years.

Walters' methods in recruiting and interviewing prospective damtenders, ex. Henry Dart and Ike Kolb.

9 mins. Poor pay for damtenders in early years, describes Anderson's garden and cow at Pokegama, St. Paul reservations about such use of property.

Abuses of officers' quarters - month long family vacations, monopoly of damtenders time.

14 mins. Abolition of family quarters use after WWII, - buildings eventually moved off dam sites.

Return to dwellings, notes Pokegama house cut down in size, discusses flowerbeds as maintenance problem, no liquor rule at dams (story of particular incident with visiting engineer in a Wheaton cafe).

Retirement December 1965.

U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS, ST. PAUL DISTRICT

ORAL HISTORY AGREEMENT FORM

I, J. Wesley Walters, a participant in
an oral history interview recorded on December 8, 1987,
hereby give and deliver to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, St. Paul
District all the incidents of ownership in that interview, including
copyright, from this time forward.

Signed:

Date Dec. 8, 1987

J. Wesley Walters
Donor

1288 No. Victoria
Address

St. Paul, MN 55117

Signed:

Jo Beatti
Interviewer

Interview with Wesley Walters by Jo Blatti
December 8, 1987
Corps/Mississippi Headwaters Project

Int. This is Tuesday, December 8th, I am Jo Blatti interviewing Wesley Walters for the Corps of Engineers project.

Now, I wondered if I could start by asking you a little bit about how you - let's start at the beginning a little bit, so I have some context for how you came to be in the Corps of Engineers. Were you trained as an engineer and is that how you entered the Corps?

Walters Yes.

Mrs. W. He went to MIT. He is a graduate in Boston.

Walters I took the exams for Junior Engineer in my senior year at school.

Int. Now, when would that have been?

Walters 1929.

Int. Ok

Walters I interviewed for different jobs and took one in St. Louis with the Bemis Bag Company. I started in July, and in October, the big crash came and - . After that, I realized that I would be the first one out when they cut down the force and so I asked if my Junior Engineer grades were still in effect and would be recognized and they said they'd expire in two weeks, so they put me on the regular open list for jobs. And as a result, I had offers from about 10 different districts to work with the Corps. Not knowing what the Corps did really, or any district, I went to the district office in St. Louis and then to the division office in St. Louis and asked their opinion, where to go to work. And they recommended going to St. Paul.

Int. Now, why did they recommend St. Paul?

Walters Because they said there was a good engineer in charge of the program up there, and they expected a lot of work in the St. Paul district. At that time, they had the assignment of getting out the 308 reports which were requested by Congress and covered all the rivers in the district, and a study was to cover navigation,

water power, flood control. And that was going on when I arrived in St. Paul.

Int. So there was kind of a major study underway there?

Walters Yes, there was. Hibbert Hill was the man in charge of those studies. He's the one that hired me.

Int. Now, were you hired, because the Corps is such a complicated place, you were a civilian, you weren't an Army officer?

Walters No. Civilian.

Int. And that's your whole career was as a civilian engineer.

Walters That's right.

Int. Did that mean that you were in the GS system. Is that right?

Walters Well, it was before that.

Int. Oh, ok.

Walters At that time they had the lowest grade of engineers was Junior Engineer and then, oh, I've forgotten all the different grades. I think there was four steps in the engineering profession at that time. And, I was hired as Junior Engineer.

Int. Ok.

Walters I started out on surveys, field surveys. And then later they asked me to take this assignment of handling the Headwater reservoirs, operation and maintenance of those and also handling all permits issued by the district.

Int. Ok, now, when did you begin to take responsibility for the Headwaters?

Walters Actually, it was in 1932.

Int. Ok, so fairly soon after you got there. What were the Headwaters like when you started out there. I mean, who was up there? And how often did you go up there? What were the dams really doing?

Walters Well, that was before paved roads almost. Most of the roads up through there were gravel. They had to drive into town to get their groceries quite a distance except for Federal Dam, they had the store there. The

men had to read gages morning and evening and make changes and discharge as we requested. They handled all the maintenance of the structures, practically, and except major if we put in contracts. But general maintenance, they handled all that. They would order, and obtain local bids for materials that they needed in areas there. And they had big books that they kept records in.

Int. The big log books.

Walters Big log books and -

Int. Did they send those down to you at the end of the year, or did they stay at the dams?

Walters We kept those at the dams and they sent in daily reports, on cards.

Int. Did they mail them or - ?

Walters Yes, they mailed them.

Int. And did you talk to them by telephone or by radio; how often would you talk to the damtenders?

Walters Oh, not too often. We'd send up orders, usually written, quite often written orders and if was just a general approach to handling discharges. But if there was anything special, we would call them up. And I'd go up there. I don't know just how often I went, maybe every two or three weeks or once a month.

Int. Oh, now that is more often than I would have guessed, I think.

Walters Alot depended on what we had to do. We did quite a bit of repair work on the structures. One of the big jobs we had during the depression was a make-work projects. We widened the roadways across the tops of the dams. We had to put in fill and widen them, too, they were just single lane roads over the dams in early construction.

Int. Now, when you did that kind of work, was it for people who just lived right in that area or did you have Civilian Conservation Corps people come in or - ?

Walters We'd hire local people to come, and then we had to hire men to shovel the dirt into the wagons. Wagons would drive out and dump the loads on the dike and keeping widening them that way. This was really a make-work.

Int. The old-fashioned way, too.

Walters It was old fashioned, yes. And then we had - we built a new bridge over the dam at Winni to give it a double lane for passing cars and we widened the road. That was by contract. And we couldn't widen the one at Leech. That's still just a one lane road across the dam, but we widened the dike to a two lane, because it is quite long at the north end.

Int. Now, when you went up there would you stay at the officers' quarters?

Walters There were officers' quarters at all the dams. They were small buildings that had two bedrooms and a bathroom and office space. They were built because the - in the old days, when they were building, rebuilding the dams they had an engineer that would stay in there and hire the local help and make repairs to the dam, major repairs, rebuilding in several cases. I don't know if you want to know the story about the dams. The original dams at Winni, Leech and Pokegama were all timber structures. Rock filled timber cribs, piers and they were rebuilt with concrete in, beginning I think in 1899 for Winni and following at Leech and then Pokegama.

Int. Almost 15 years after they were originally built, I didn't realize they had been rebuilt quite so early.

Walters Well, the timber rotted, you see. They had no chemical treatment of timber. They just used the local timber; and it wasn't treated and it rotted out. So they had to rebuild it with concrete, and fortunately, they had men that used very dry concrete in building them; they used tampers to tamp the concrete into the forms, and they are still in existence. The same piers are there today. Structures are there today at those three upper ones.

Int. Now, I take it that in engineering terms, that's kind of impressive. I mean that would have been fairly early concrete work, wouldn't it?

Walters It was. It was early concrete work. And later on, in building other dams, the contractors used more water in the concrete and many of those failed. Power dams that were built in the 1920s. They started crumbling down after 15-20 years and had to be repaired and many major, major reconstruction on them. Here are these dams, still good today. After that good work by those engineers.

Int. Now, when you went up every two or three weeks or once a month, did you stay for a couple of days or was it kind of like a day trip?

Walters No, I would be gone from the office maybe three days, depending on what I had to do at each of the different dams. I'd usually stop at all of them on a swing. Maybe, when we were widening the dikes I was up there, I'd stay maybe a day or two at a site to see how things were going. What they needed in the way of materials and so on.

Int. Now, would there have been another engineer who was on-site all the time while this was going on or were you the - ?

Walters The damtenders usually handled it.

Int. They read the drawings and did whatever was necessary?

Walters There wasn't too much of that kind of work at that time. If we hired contractors, then we had an engineer up there. Like building the bridge at Winni, we had an engineer go up there during that work. Otherwise, the damtenders supervised.

Int. Can you tell me about snow sampling? We were just talking before we turned the machine on and got semi-formal here about how hard it was to predict the rainfall annually. But, of course, that was what you needed to know to operate the dams. And all of the damtenders when I went up last year and talked to some of the older damtenders. They all told me about snow sampling. Which I assume was an effort to predict on the basis of snow. Is that right? Can you give me like the St. Paul District version of what that meant and what people were trying to do with that?

Walters Well, you see, there is no melting during the winter. So late in the spring, before it melts at the end, they would either go up or have a crew go up and work with them or the damtenders had, I believe they had equipment to make some measurements themselves. I don't recall if they actually had, each one actually had equipment themselves, but they would go up and usually someone from the office would go up, not from the office, but we had the crew that went around and set gages and that was the job they got in the spring - to go out and make snow surveys. And it was important in that a lot depended on how much snow there was, and then how it melted as to how much inflow would go into

the reservoirs. Because, you could have a lot of snow and with a proper freezing at night and thawing in the daytime, that snow could disappear and you not get any, any noticable, hardly, inflow to the reservoirs. It would seep in later, but it wasn't a sudden inflow. But in the '50s when we had the terrific floods up there, there was a big accumulation of snow and a cold spring and it didn't melt until late. And then warm rains fell on it, and it warmed up quick. And then we had this terrific inflow that filled the reservoirs.

Int. I saw when I was up in the Headwaters last winter the pictures that the Kolbs had of what it was like - the dam didn't go, but it certainly overflowed.

Walters Oh, we had a big crew at Sandy to take that, sandbagged dikes and everywhere.

Int. No, I saw - . Now, I take it talking with the damtenders that they didn't come down to St. Paul much.

Walters No. Almost never. I started the meetings of the lockmasters, annual meetings of the lockmasters in either 1952 or 1953.

Int. Was that here or up there?

Walters Here, for the locks and dams.

Int. Oh, I see, on the Mississippi.

Walters Yes. It was interesting. I suggested it, and the immediate bosses didn't agree with me.

Int. Why was that?

Walters Oh, they didn't think it was necessary. That would take them off of the job and so on. But the District Engineer agreed with me, so we went ahead and had the first one. I've forgotten where we held that. I think it was at LaCrosse, and we met, for I think three days and a lot of them drove from the dams there. Some stayed over. And that is still going on, having a lockmasters meeting during the winter.

Int. And the Headwaters damtenders come to that, too. They are not lockmasters but - ?

Walters That's right. I didn't have them come down for the first meetings. This was a discussion about maintenance on the locks and dams. But later on, we had people come from the office and give talks to them

about making purchases and regulations on paperwork and so on that they needed instruction on. So then we brought the damtenders down. We held them here in St. Paul. We didn't have them go down to Winona or LaCrosse at that time. But now I guess it's an annual thing. I am not sure if it's annual. I attended one of the lockmasters a few years ago just to see if I knew anyone down there. And there were about three or four that knew me, but otherwise, it was complete replacement.

Int. Now, you were kind of directly in charge of the Headwaters until when?

Walters Through 1950, 1951. I took over all the structures in the district then.

Int. Now, one of the things I am most curious about, and I hope you can help me, but please don't worry about it if you can't, is the way things changed in the Headwater. It looks to me in reading the records. Now, I know that all this recreational stuff kind of comes out of the flood control act of 1944 in terms of where it is located and when something is written down, but I am very curious as to how the Corps got into the business of recreation and how the policy began to develop, and I wonder if you have any memories of that?

Walters Oh, yes. That's where I sat in and made this fellow so mad. It was the Flood Control Act, when would that have been, '40-?, well, they just gave the Corps the job to take care of overall flood control.

Int. Yeah.

Walters It was passed, authorized by Congress. And so they built reservoirs all over the country. And in acquiring the rights, they bought the land that was to be flooded by those reservoirs up to some point above the pool level. And so, they owned a lot of land, and those were new reservoirs. There was no recreation existing in the area, so people knew they were going to be used for recreation. So they set up an organization in the chief's office and I attended, and that's where we locked horns about-. I was for letting the local people handle recreation developments. I'd say, lease the land out to them and let them build it.

Int. Now, when you say local people, are you thinking of the people who already owned resorts?

Walters People who lived in the area. Because recreation grew around the reservoirs. And they had resorts all around

them and they leased the land from the Forest Service. Because the Forest Service at that time would have been established and they had acquired control over much of the land. So they leased land to these people who built resorts and took care of the needs of the public that way. And, I felt, suggested, they could do that on these other reservoirs that they were building. But, this fellow in the Chief's office, he thought wasn't enough, that the federal government ought to build the resorts themselves instead of leasing the land out. And that is when it got its impetus with all the construction of reservoirs, all the reservoirs, around through the United States.

Int. Now, when you were in charge of the Headwaters and those years after the war, did you see much - were people beginning to camp at the reservoirs a lot or was the Corps in St. Paul beginning - ? The thing I am trying to piece together, and I realize it is a little after you have assumed other responsibilities, but recreation as kind of a category in the St. Paul annual reports beginning in '63, '64 and around then. And I've looked at the master plans that were drawn up then for doing the camper pads and all that. But I was just curious to know if you saw, if you noticed, more people using the Corps damsites in the years that you were going up there or - ?

Walters Well, we ran into the problem of leasing land for public use at Leech Lake Dam to start with. There was a great demand for having boat liveries out of Federal Dam.

Int. Well, there always had been hadn't there, I mean for a long time?

Walters Yes, for a long time. I don't know just when that started, but when I took over the reservoirs, they already had granted a lease to a very narrow strip of land on the shore for these boat liveries people to establish their little headquarters on this stretch of land there. And I think the land was actually leased to the town of Federal Dam, and they divided it between these different operators.

Int. Oh, I see.

Walters Well, I went up there, and it was so narrow a piece that they just didn't have room to park cars or do anything at all, hardly. And actually, it was so bad that they had a public toilet built out over the bank.

Int. Meaning it was just like an outhouse?

Walters Yes, an outhouse and I thought about that. My gosh, this is really an unhealthy situation, and I talked to the state people about it. And I knew that if they went up and inspected it, they'd say close down this thing. So, I talked in the office about giving them a much wider strip. And the old chief clerk [John Wade], who had been there since 1898, I guess, he started, he was, oh no, we don't want to destroy the privacy of the damtenders there by having all these people. Well, I said, it's an unhealthy situation, and we either have got to close it down or give them some more space. And he finally admitted, well, we better give them more space. So they took out all the stuff they had on the riverbank and put it back. We gave them enough space so they could space it back and have room for cars to park and the toilets back over on the land there and so on. And that was the start of recreational development up there, really.

Int. Now, this would have been when, in the '30s or in the '40s?

Walters That was in '35 or '36, I think.

Int. Before I went up to talk with people last winter in this little pilot series, I did go to the Minnesota Historical Society. They asked me at the Corps to look at everything from 1884, I mean, I just couldn't do all the research, but just see what was around, what I could find in libraries and at the Historical Society. And one thing that I found that interested me a great deal was a folder full of guides and railroad time tables for resorts in places like Ball Park and Leech Lake and Federal Dam and Winnibigosh and Walker and - . Apparently the railroads in the late 19th century had gone directly into these towns and they had taken people to them.

Walters Passenger trains.

Int. And, when I talked with Ole Henderson and LeRoy Campbell, they remembered an old, that the town of Federal Dam had used to run a campground itself when they were growing up.

Walters This is the one I am speaking of.

Int. I didn't realize it was a complete campground you were - .

Walters Well, it wasn't until, I guess, we got this added land. They may have had a separate place that they had for people who [cross talk]

Int. They were describing to me a pavillion. It was a big open air kitchen or dining hall, really, with sides and a big public pump that was there for people who came to camp to use. And, in fact, when I was at the Corps offices last week, John Anfinson showed me some little old pictures, little from a Brownie Kodak, black and whites taken in the '30s and '40s as far as we can tell. And, there is like town views of Federal Dam and there are a couple of big buildings there, and we were trying to figure out if one of them could have been this pavillion, this camping dining room. Do you remember anything like that when you were up there?

Walters They used to have a fairly large building there for entertainment, a place big enough for groups to gather in. I think that burned down sometime along the line. I have forgotten just when. I used to drive through there, the little town, coming and going. But I didn't spend that much time poking around. I did get acquainted with a number of people there. But I know that when I made this proposal for the additional land that they would have to clean up the waterfront. I think there were four or five boat operators there at that time. They were all put out that they had to do all the work, and they came down to the office and -

Int. Oh, you mean, all the way to St. Paul?

Walters Clear to St. Paul and talked about it and I pointed out that this was too unhealthy a situation. It had to be cleaned up and that it might cost them some money, but otherwise we would, just couldn't go on with that unhealthy situation because we would be blamed for allowing it. So, they went back up there, and they all fixed up places. And then they were delighted, because their business picked up, and it was much more convenient for them. And that was really the first improvement or enlargement of the recreational facilities on Corps property.

Tape One Side Two

Int. Now, let me ask you about one other improvement. When I interviewed Ike Kolb he was telling me about how when he came up from having been down on the Mississippi River after the war, he remembers beginning to kind of brush out the point on Sandy. To the best of his memory, he remembers doing that in the late 40s. I wondered if you remembered that happening about then and I am trying to find some corroboration or not corroboration, if there isn't any.

Walters Let's see. I'd say that he may have done some work

in the '40s. I remember the flood at '50, we had all those sandbagged dikes all around there and we had to clean those all up. And in the spring, I remember the people, after the floods, in the summer after that, people were coming in there and they'd camp out on that point. Then we put in toilets for them later on.

Int. So, again, this would be in the early '50s.

Walters I believe it was. I guess it was before. Well, I shouldn't say. Somewhere in the '50s, I would guess, late '40s and early '50s maybe.

Int. I am just kind to try and see just what people's memories can tell me since the only written down stuff seems to be back around World War I, when you get all these flyers for fish guides at Leech Lake and then in the mid '60s there is the master plans that were written. And you can tell from the way those [plans] were written that people had been camping, but it is very hard to get a sense of how it started or - .

Walters Tying it down to a specific time, I don't know that I can help very much on that.

Int. It's alright.

Walters There was always a lot of traffic around the reservoirs in those earlier years. That was all private development then, and except at Leech, there wasn't very much done for anyone.

Int. So Leech was the place you would go for fish guides or something and that's where - .

Walters Yes, and that's where the concentration of the boat operators was. It attracted alot of people into the town of Federal Dam. So Federal Dam was interested and took the lease of that land and looked after it pretty much for us.

Int. For instance, if you went to Sandy or something because you happened to be visiting a resort or your family had a cabin or you were just fishing for the day. Did you, as you were going up and back in those years, did you notice more traffic or - .

Walters Oh, the improvement of roads was the indicator.

Int. Do you remember when the roads got better?

Walters Oh, it was a gradual thing. I think No. 2 Highway was built into concrete fairly early after I got

up in that area.

Int. Did that cut down on your travel time?

Walters Oh, it helped quite abit, yes. Because the road in front Federal Dam was just gravel to Federal Dam from No. 2. And they finally blacktopped that. It was just a gradual improvement all through the area.

Int. Did you go up all seasons of the year regularly?

Walters Didn't go up much in the wintertime.

Int. I wondered about that.

Walters Once in a great while, we'd go up. We had public hearings occasionally up in that area. I remember in 1931, we went up to a public hearing when they wanted to build a dam at the outlet of Mud Lake. The State of Minnesota was going to build this dam to control the flow there and hold the water in Mud Lake, so the wild rice would grow.

Int. I was going to say, would this have been about wild rice?

Walters Right. And, so the first dam was built of timbers and that washed out in the high waters of, oh, it must have been in the '40s. Then they actually abandoned the project. And later on, fellow who was the head of, oh the division of waters, I think they called it at that time, there was a demand for restoring the dam and he got mad at me. He said well, you can transfer your flowage rights that you have around Mud Lake to the state. And I said, well, what was his name, I said well, we had flowage rights only for the flow discharge of water from the reservoirs, we weren't ponding it; we were just discharging it down through there and that is a different purpose than you are going to have. You want a permanent overflow right. Oh, he said, you Corps never wants to cooperate with we people. I said well, you have to realize it is for a different purpose and how can the Corps say yes, you can build a dam there and overflow someone's land. And he finally cooled down. And then I said, besides, you abandoned that dam site. You had hearings up there to abandon the dam and he turned to the state fellow and he said, is that right, and he said, yes. He said, why didn't you tell me? He says, I guess I forgot. And, I thought, oh my, I'm going to get this guy fired. But he didn't fire him, but then they had to go back and pass legislation to re-establish the right to build the dam there. And then they built it of better quality,

and it's still there.

Int. I understand that the Corps still has something to do with Mud Lake. Ole Henderson and LeRoy Campbell were talking a little bit about, apparently, the Corps staff go down to look at it every once in a while for the State.

Walters Well, they look at the gages and control the discharges and try not to flood out - . Especially when the wild rice is coming into harvest, they want good levels so the canoes can fit in there, but they don't want it so high as to knock the rice down and so on.

Int. Now, did you deal much with the Native American community or with commercial rice growers when you were -

Walters The one that did most of that was Carl Anderson, the one we were suggesting that you might want to talk to. Because he got to know them and they actually gave him some kind of a plaque or something for his cooperation with the tribe up there with the wild rice harvest.

Int. This would have been when he was at Gull Lake?

Walters No, he was at Pokegama. And we didn't have a damtender at Leech during the war, and we had him go up and operate the dam up there.

Int. Oh, I see, so he commuted.

Walters It was during the war that we had this terrific flood. And above the dam at Leech, there is a lot of bog area.

Int. I have heard about that, too.

Walters And, in '44 that bog came down and jammed into the dam and it rolled over and it plugged the dam. It plugged the dam. Well, we tried - we sent Carl up there and we got him a little bit of a boat that he could drag over this thing and be in. And then he took and cut this bog in chunks so it'd go on through the sluices. And we tried to get help for him, and they had the prisoners of war in, what's the name of the little town, the main highway up there - ?

Int. It's not Cass Lake?

Walters No. Right where the highway to Federal Dam joins the -

Int. Remer?

Walters No.

Int. No, that is the one in between. We're going to have to go look at a map.

Walters They had the prisoners of war. And we suggested that maybe give those men something to do and to come down and help, but all the red tape was just too much. We couldn't get any help for him. He worked like a dog getting the bog through the dam.

Int. That must have been quite a job for one person.

Walters He worked like the dickens, I tell you.

Int. Now, my impression is that until recreation came in, the damtenders were really quite alone. They didn't have much in the way of help.

Walters No, they did an awful lot themselves.

Int. They were by themselves.

Walters They hired help if they had to have some extra help, but they did an awful lot by themselves. And of course, the operations of the dams has been changed especially in Pokegama and at Winni. They've put in gates. It was all stop logs, as they called them in the early days. Some were pretty big timbers that they had to pull up and down, and it was quite a job for them. We changed the gates to discharge the flow.

Int. So, it was a very specific of manual operation. No dials and knobs.

Walters Especially in the wintertime, chopping that ice out trying to get those stop logs out. It was a nasty job, and they had to do an awful lot themselves. It improved terrifically and at a terrific cost, but (indecipherable) decision.

Int. Now, how well did you get to know, did you have the opportunity, really, to get to know people who owned resorts or had property?

Walters Oh my, yes. They were always complaining about low water or high water and so on. And I'd go out there and meet with them and talk to them about it. And I remember Colonel Barnes was District Engineer through that high water. And we got a letter from this guy, he was former Army man or something, and he said, I don't like the way you are operating this, and I don't have

any beach in front of my cabin. And he said, if you come up here, I'm liable to throw you in the lake or something. Well, it happened that we had to hold a public hearing up in that area right after we got the letter. So we went up on Sunday, and Monday morning we got up and went out to his place and knocked on the door and he wasn't up yet. And the Colonel said, well, I'm the District Engineer from St. Paul. He said I'm here to see what your trouble is, and if you want to throw me in the lake, here I am. [Laughs]

Int. What did he do?

Walters He backed down. His complaint was that he had a little stretch of beach, and we had changed the water level maybe six inches, and we had caused - . It brought water up over this little beach that was maybe 8 or 10 feet wide along the lakeshore. And he cooled off and had to admit that he didn't really have much of a problem.

We had another case where we got a call one day from somewhere on Whitefish Lake, one of the lakes up there. That, oh, there were hundreds of fish been killed by the change in water level.

Int. Now, would that kill fish?

Walters Well, I was going to tell you the rest of the story. So, we had Jarl Ekberg who is at Gull Lake Dam go out and meet this guy that had called and go out and look at it. So, the fellow himself couldn't go, but he had another man who knew the area and he said, he'll go out with you because I am busy. You go out and look at this, and he will show you all these dead fish. So they drove down to this lake, and they walked around the lake quite a ways and didn't find but one dead fish. And the guy that was walking with him says oh, let's go back, this is just a wild goose chase or something. And so we wrote a letter to him and told him what we had done and the report was that they had found one dead fish on the lake, and so we didn't think conditions were too bad. That stopped the whole complaint. I don't think we had another complaint from that area. We just, by getting a man right up there and said, show us, and they thought, well, let's keep our mouths shut.

Int. Now, you told me about a big meeting in the '30s of the Water Level Improvement Association.

Walters Yeah, '35.

Int. What was - was that something that happened in the

'30s or did people keep belonging - could you just tell me what it is, I mean, explain?

Walters Oh, Water Level Associations? Well, it was the result of our pulling the reservoirs down and then the drought hitting and it didn't come back up again. The water levels were so low that there were long reaches from the resorts out to the water line. And they didn't like it, and, I guess, in some places you couldn't get through from one lake to another like at the Whitefish Chain. It was low, and you couldn't get from one lake to another, because there were sand-bars across.

These associations developed and were in effect until we got the reservoirs up. And we didn't really get them back up, til, I think it was in the fall or winter of 1937 or '38, and that was true especially at Winni. There was about an 8 or 9" deluge of rain up north of Winni, and the runoff from that started the reservoirs up. And from then on, we got more rain and brought them up and then the associations dissolved. They didn't have the reason to continue their complaints. They got the water levels back, and we had established then as a result of that, the Corps agreed to establish minimum operating levels in each of the lakes. And I went around and interviewed people talked to them about what level they would like and so forth, and so we established it. I wrote, I think the regulations that are still controlling that I drafted, and we established those levels for each of them.

And, I am trying to think when it was we had complaints on Leech about the water level that we had there, and Colonel Brown had just come to the district and they wanted a representative of the Corps there. So he wasn't familiar with them at all, so we suggested that he not go and if I came back with questions that I couldn't answer, we could give them an answer by letter. And, no, he said, I want to go up and attend the hearing. Well, there was a State Supreme Court Judge had a place on Leech. And when the meeting started, they called on different people, prominent people, to get up and voice their objections or whatever. And this Judge got up, and he ripped into the Corps that we weren't holding the proper level in Leech. And so, they called on the District Engineer to answer the question. Well, he said he didn't know anything about the operation of the reservoir at all and referred the questions to me. So they put me on the witness stand and made you swear that you were telling the truth. And they kept me on there beginning at 10 in the morning and

then there was a break for lunch, and then I was on til 2 maybe 2:30 in the afternoon, answering questions about establishing the level. I said, well, I went around the lake and I interviewed these people and the people at the upper end, far back from the dam wanted a higher level and that the people down below wanted a lower level. And so, we put it at 2 feet - half-way between what they were. And I said it would be nice if we could tilt the reservoir and give them higher water up there and lower here, but we didn't know how to control it that way. We hadn't developed that. And kind of struck a cord right there, and I remember when one of the legislators came to me after the hearing and he expressed his appreciation for - .

Int. Was this a Minnesota State Legislature?

Walters Minnesota State Legislature had the hearings.

Int. Now, this wasn't the '61 hearing was it?

Walters This was in '40 - . Oh, when was that? I don't know when Colonel Brown came in, you would have to look that up.

Int. Ok.

Walters It was just after he came in.

Int. I'm just curious because you mentioned a Supreme Court Justice, and I've just finished doing another research and writing project on a completely different subject. But one of the people that I interviewed for that project was telling me about a Minnesota Supreme Court Justice who was particularly well known for his environmental concerns and was a great leader and wondered if that would be the same man.

Walters I don't know, I don't know. I know his complaint was particular to Leech, because he had a place on Leech. But, we had another hearing the next day about Winni. And I guess that was about it. I don't remember if they had one down here or not, I've forgotten. But that was, the big one was at Federal Dam.

Int. Now, when you had hearings like this, would it be the summertime when people who had cabins would be up there?

Walters That was when they held this one.

Int. Now, as you kind of think back in answer to my question, it appears that you were up there a lot, I mean, on a

fairly regular basis and that there were issues that people who lived in the area, either year-round or in the summertime raised, it sounds like you might be up there once a year to answer some kind of complaint. Would that be true?

Walters Oh, yes, we had quite a few complaints during that, cause we went from the low water to the extreme high water in that period.

Int. In those years after the war?

Walters Well, before and after the war. In 1932, when I took over until '37, it was low.

Int. There were problems, and then -

Walters Then we got into the floods beginning in '44, when we had the terrifically high water and -

Int. And then there were the '50s.

Walters There were always, always complaints. I know that I went to a hearing at oh, where was it held, I guess it was at Cass Lake. And there was a fellow that came from oh, I almost got the name of that town. Let me see if I can find that thing. [Goes off in search of a map]

Int. Well, Bena's a real center up in the Headwaters and has been for a long time.

Walters Well, this fellow has a resort north of the town of Bena, right at the beach at Winnibigosh. And he'd been jumping on the Corps and writing letters and giving us the devil all the time. And at this meeting, he got up and he just ripped into me, in particular, because I was there; about didn't use good judgement in the operation of the reservoirs and so on and caused him alot of trouble and so forth. And finally, I said, well, I admit it's a matter of judgement and it's hard to out-guess old mother nature; we do the best we could. But I said, I believe it said in the Bible that you shouldn't build a house on sand. And, I said, where did you build your resort? And he wouldn't say. But I said well, you built it right out on the sand, didn't you. Did you use good judgement? And that kind of shut him up. And I know there was a professor from the University, they used to have a surveying camp up in that area, and he was up there. He said, no one should have to take insults like you had to take tonight.

Int. Well, you know I have been thinking about that as we've

been talking. It sounds like you had to take a lot of insults sometimes.

Walters Oh, they were really hot-headed about it a lot of times.

Int. Was it just about the water level? Or, was it about other things?

Walters Mainly the water level.

Int. As you've been telling me about the meetings and things, it's occurred to me to wonder, do you think people were more patient before the Corps put something in up there you know?

Walters Well, there weren't any people there. In '84, there was no one there. All the people that worked on the first dams that were built were Indians, and they wrote their Indian names in the books. And then, when they rebuilt the dam in concrete in '98, they had adopted English names, and they were in English names. The same Indians were around there that worked on these dams.

Int. That's interesting.

Walters Oh, when they were built, it was wild country. There was no one up there. They had to haul up all the steel that they put in the dam. And nothing was fabricated, they fabricated it at the dam site.

Int. So, it was really hauling stuff in and there was really nobody up there except loggers. I know that people didn't homestead there until the 19 teens, but it was all cutover timber. Did you know very much, or meet very many of the Indian people who lived in the area when you were -

Walters No. I had a few that came, and we hired a few to work around there. But I really didn't know them well, but Carl Anderson got to know them in his connection with the wild rice industry. He knew them real well. As I say, you should talk to him.

(Mrs. W. seconds suggestion:)

Int. Well, this is a new name to me, and I will put it on the list of people.

Walters I will give you his telephone number and his address.

Int. I know that, it appears to me, and I am going to ask about it when I go back next week that there have always been a lot of Indian and that there's a big mixed

community up there once the Corps came in and the dams were built, and people came into do that work along with the Indians. That there's a real complicated kind of reservation community, and then a Corps community and just a minute, I have to [insert a new tape].

Tape Two, Side One

Int. I was just asking if you were aware, really, or observed much about the Native Americans and the other kinds of ethnic and communities up in the Headwaters, in the time that you were going in and out, if you had occasion to -

Walters No, I didn't. But I knew that the damtenders knew a number of them. And there were alot of them around Bena, and I would see them, have little cabins and so on around there. And, then, of course, Mille Lac, there is a large establishment of Native Indians there. And I didn't really have much to do with them. I went in one time and saw them about something; I've forgotten why I stopped there, but I really didn't have too many contacts with them.

Int. Did your family, I mean, before we turned on the tape recorder, we were just kind of visiting a little bit. You were saying, oh yes, we saw so and so up in the Headwaters over the summer. Did you and your family go up for holidays and things? Or summer vacation?

Walters No. We, once in a while, would go up. We went up one time for Memorial Day at Sandy Lake Dam. You were along with me once or twice when we stopped at Winni.

Mrs. W We got to know Carl real well.

Walters Carl Farr (?). Yes, but before that, Harold Olson was the lockmaster or damtender at Winni. And he had two children, they were just a little older than our Bob, our first son. And I guess, we stopped at the different places when we made a trip around. You went with me on, as I say, a trip once in a while, but most of my trips were hurried and I was just taking care of specific problems and traveled myself.

I know I was up at Winni when we were, I've forgotten whether we were on the dike or on the floating bridge, and I got, I was told that Captain Pettit from the office had called and wanted me down to the office tomorrow. So, I got the message about 5 o'clock and they had the meal about ready. So I ate and then I drove down after that from Winni and got home about 10 o'clock, 10:30 or whatever it was. And got down to the office

the next morning and went into his office and said, well, what did you call me down for? Oh, he said, I thought you ought to be in the office instead of up there at the lake. Gee, I was mad. I said, I don't go up there to loaf, I was busy. I was damn mad, because I drove from the lake last night getting down here. So, I didn't hear any more calls from him. Something like that has to happen once in a while I guess.

But that was one thing. I used to fish once in a while when I went up there at first. In fact, I went up with the First District Engineer that was here when I came and went up to, I think it was Pine River Dam. And we were there over a weekend, and I went out with them fishing. And I didn't fish otherwise except late in the evening, I might go down to the river and fish a little bit. But I was blamed for spending, or accused of spending too much time, because I did some work for the fellows in charge of the hydraulic branch, and he was always unhappy that I spent too much time up at the Headwater Reservoirs, he thought. And he'd accuse me of going fishing. Always doing too much fishing up there. So, I didn't get a license. The next time he jumped me about it I told him, no, I don't do any fishing up there; I don't have a license and I don't want to hear anything about fishing again from you. So he dropped that subject.

But I enjoyed the contacts. I got to know so many people, and I got to know the area all around the shoreline of all the reservoirs, practically, and found it quite interesting.

Int. Were there people that you remember up there? I know you mentioned a newspaper editor in the water improvement story.

Walters He was a character. He sold thousands of subscriptions to his newspaper by his write-ups against the Corps in those early years when the water was down and then the floods. And he asked us to have a meeting at, where was that now, I guess it was at Deer River, I'm not sure. Come up to a meeting up there, and it was all about high water. He was ripping into the Corps about it. And finally, at the end of the meeting he said, well we've had a man here at this meeting who hasn't had a word all day, but I know he is interested in what has been said here and I would like to have him summarize this. He's the editor of the Grand Rapids Review. And he got up and he said, well, I didn't intend to speak, but I've listened to what has been said and he said, I am glad, Mr. Wolf, that

the Corps of Engineers is running the Headwater Reservoirs and not you. One of the worst putdowns I think I have ever seen anyone get.

Int. Now, was that Elmer Anderson, do you think? He used to be a politician who ran a newspaper in Grand Rapids. I wonder if that would be him? [interviewer error: Anderson is from Brainerd]

Walters No, what's the name up there, George Rossman, George Rossman, Herald Review. And not long after that, he died and his son took over and was editor until he just sold the paper, I guess a couple of years ago. But I'd known George and attended meetings with him. He and I didn't see eye to eye on a lot of things, because he was for taking care of the needs of the people up there 100%, which was perfectly proper, whereas our approach was, we got to do the least harm and the greatest good we can in operating those reservoirs. And, when you have high water, get them down as soon as you can, but you can't flood out all the people down below. You've got them to look out for. Because at Aitken, there's an area there where they had a lot of farms and they farmed them heavily during the war. Raised tremendous crops of potatoes and things, and they were in the high waters at that time. They had to have the flood down by the 15th of May, so they could get in and plant their potatoes and so on, or they would have a terrific loss. And I remember that I made a prediction that we would have the flood down by that date. And so we were discharging heavily, so I had cut back on it some. And they have a flood stage at Aitken specified, I've forgotten what it was now, 14 feet or something. And I had to be out of the office when it happened. And one of the supervisors there, he was all upset that I wasn't there. And his report was that they didn't have it down to that flood level in the morning reading, but it got down there about mid day. And someone called in and said, well, it is down to that level at mid day on the 15th of May. And I got kind of a kick out of that, because I came back and the fellow that was working for me, did a lot of leg work for awhile on the reservoirs, and he said oh, you're terrible, you didn't have it down until just about 12 o'clock. You got it down there that day. That's terrible. [Laughs]

Int. Now, how much help did you have in St. Paul? You were just mentioning someone who did some of the leg work with you.

Walters Well, I didn't have any help on running the reservoirs

until - , I don't know just when this was. They gave me other assignments, and I wrote alot of different reports. I wrote most of the small boat harbor reports on the harbors that were built up and down the Mississippi River. And so when I got those extra assignments, then I got someone to help make some of the trips up there.

Int. But for most of the time, it was a one-man operation in St. Paul and it was a one-man operation at the reservoirs during your years?

Walters Until the latter part of it. I'd say the last five years I had some help. I guess we made a lot of studies there, and I had several people working for me on studies on trying to get - . We tried to determine if the records of the close stages in the reservoirs could be in any kind of a cycle, and we made quite a study of it and we couldn't come up with any cycle.

Int. No pattern could be -

Walters No pattern at all. This thing of having the highest flow one year and the lowest, low the next year -

Int. That didn't work either.

Walters That doesn't help much. I had a fellow working for me that was a brilliant guy. He was a self-taught engineer. And he wore glasses, and he had his little cord on the glass that he would put around his ear. Sort of an English type of guy; lot them thought he was queer character, but he was brilliant. And I'd say, Dennis, I've got a job for you. Want you to do this kind of a study or something, and I'd explain. And he would sit there and smoke a pipe and shut his eyes, listen to me and smoke a little bit, sit back and [I'd] say, that's it, OK. So, he would go back to his - he always liked to work at a drafting table. So he would sit there. Finally, he would reach in and start to pull out some paper and start working on this thing. Brilliant, he could give you an answer on anything, any kind of problem. He was really good. He wasn't educated, and he couldn't get a high grade because he wouldn't accept it, because he said, no I can't swear - are you a college graduate, no, he wasn't a college graduate. So, if you didn't have that you couldn't be a Senior Engineer or have any Engineer title, really. And so he wouldn't lie about it; he'd just didn't know. They wanted me to fire him, and I said, that's foolish because he can outperform any engineer in the office on almost anything put up to him. So they didn't push the issue.

Mrs. W. He was a bachelor, and he always talked about his mother. He called her momma. I liked him; he was very nice to talk to. Brilliant.

Int. How did he get his training?

Walters A terrific mind, memory. When he was 12, 13 or something, his eyes started bothering him. And he kept studying, he didn't care whether he went to school or not. He'd study on his own. And finally the doctor told him, well, you better get an outside job. So, he went to the railroad; he worked in Ortonville, Minnesota.

Int. I know the name.

Walters There is a railroad track out there that has a long sweeping curve where the train comes into the valley, and it swings around - it's a long curve. Well, he was with the crew that laid that curve out when the railroad was built. And from then on, he started studying engineering and -

Mrs. W. Self taught.

Walters When I met him, he had just come back from South America where he had been Chief Locating Engineer for a railroad down there.

Int. Oh my goodness.

Walters And, he got dysentery there, and he came back because of his health. And he needed a job, and that was in the Depression. And he came down to the Corps and we gave him a job down there. And he was there 'til after World - . Well, he went down on a construction job out of the office during the war, and then he went back to railroads after that.

But they told me that he went to St. Louis one time. He wanted a job with the railroad, and the Chief Engineer said, well, I've got an assignment. Do you know how to design a continuous type of structure? I think that is what I have to have for this crossing. And he said, yes. Well, he had heard of them, but he didn't know anything about it. So he went up to the library and took books out over the weekend and he studied and he went in the next Monday morning and he started designing a continuous structure. Just that kind of a guy. He would remember everything that he had ever read. He was just amazing. All self taught.

Int. Let me look at my folder real quickly and see if there is something I wrote down that I haven't thought of.

[Machine off momentarily]

Int. In the years that you were kind of up around the Headwaters and had primary responsibility for them, were you in St. Paul, or the damtenders, or the Native American communities up in the area aware of archeological sites or old burial mounds or anything like that? Was that anything that was part of anybody's memory?

Walters No.

Int. I wondered about that and -

Walters I was never concerned about them. I never had any inquiries about them or anything.

Int. I also wanted to ask if, and I know it's after your years of special responsibilities for the Headwaters, so it may just be a moot point. But, I had encountered references to the State of Minnesota making a kind of a, what looked to me like a formal request for local operation or state operation of the Headwaters Dams around 1961 and I wondered if that was anything that you had anything to do with or - ?

Walters Oh, yes. I had quite a battle with the State over that.

Int. Oh good, tell me the story.

Walters Well, it all hinged about these complaints about the operation of the reservoirs. And uh, names - Dr. so and so, he had been the President of the St. Cloud Teachers College.

Int. Oh, I can find it easily enough knowing that.

Walters He was the head of the - what did they call it? Natural Resources, only I don't think they used that fancy name. Division of Waters or something was the state organization. Now, I've lost my train of thought.

Int. We were talking about the '61 hearings and the suggestion -

Walters Oh, they wanted them taken over. They wanted a voice in the operation of the reservoirs, because they thought they were a great resource of the state. And they should have a voice in the operation, and they demanded that right. So, we wrote a report to the Chief's office, explained to him what they wanted to do, we said we would cooperate with them. We asked

them their opinions. We always notified them of our hearings. They're invited to attend and speak at our hearings. And we listened to what they say, and we try to meet their desires in operation, but they want a voice in it. I sent that to the Chief's office and they mulled it over there for sometime. And they sent back that the Congress had assigned this duty to the Corps of Engineers. They couldn't delegate that authority to the State unless Congress authorized them to and until that was done, we would continue operating with the understanding that we try to meet the desires of the state in our operations.

Well, that didn't satisfy this man; he was very unhappy that we didn't say, yes, you can have your say and we'll follow it. Even though we practically did; we didn't have to go to them about it. We simply would operate knowing what their desires were pretty much, and so he was very bitter about it. But we had to turn him down, and they had some hearings about it. They actually had hearings here in St. Paul and they had some in the reservoir area. But that was the decision.

Int. Do you remember at that time, did people in the Headwaters themselves want control, I mean, was there strong feeling in the area?

Walters Very strong feeling in that 1935 hearing that I told you about. The Forest Service, the man in charge of the Forest Service at Cass Lake, I can't recall his name, got up at that meeting and he suggested that the operation of the Headwater Reservoirs ought to be turned over to the Forest Service. They affected the Forest Service at Leech and Winni, in particular, includes Winni and Cass Lake and that they ought to turn the operation of those two dams, at least, over to the Forest Service. Well, there was a man there that came from Washington. In fact, he rode up to the hearing with us in the car, and we didn't know who had assigned him or anything. He came back, and he didn't say much. But it was only about 2 months or so later that that man was transferred from Cass Lake to a place in Michigan, and I'm sure -

Int. Oh, and you see a connection there?

Walters Oh, I was positive of it. Because he'd been up there. It was very apparent to me that he'd seen that he got taken out of that place. Spoke out of turn.

Int. The way I would connect that would be in the sense that the Forest Service and the Corps, two federal

agencies might be crabbing at one another. What about -

Walters That was the objection. They shouldn't be crabbing.

Int. What about the people who just, I mean, ordinary citizens who lived in Deer River or Cass Lake or something? Did they, as you remember, did they want to see the dams run by somebody else?

Walters Well, they wanted them raised. They wanted them knocked down and high and so on. But yes, there was a feeling, I am sure, in fact, we didn't have a friend in the house at that meeting in Deer River in '35 in that whole crowd. Oh God, I think they'd have lynched us if someone would have said, mob these guys. It was bad for awhile. But the Division Engineer got up and he said, well, I agree with everything I've heard today. I don't blame you for crabbing about the situation here. But he says, until the God Almighty gives us some rain, we can't do anything about it. And that kind of broke up the meeting. But, they were really bitter up to that point.

Int. When you think about those kinds of meetings and things, did you feel beleaguered or did you feel like that was your job or - ?

Walters Oh, I knew the people; I agreed with them. Sure we would like to raise it, but what could you do? Rains come, you know, and then when we got the high water, this H.E. Wolf that ran the paper, I remember that day, at that hearing we had then. He said, well, he said, Mr. Walters, isn't true that there's maybe about 36 inches of evaporation off of the reservoirs each year, that much water lost? I said, well that's the estimate up to 1/4 inch of water a day maybe, goes up in evaporation. Well, he says, rainfall was not over that, he says it's less than that. He said what's the difficulty about this thing. Why do we have to have this high water? Well, I said, I don't know the figures now, I think it is 12 times as much area draining into Winnibigosh as there is in lake lands. I said, that water drains off the land and comes down there. It isn't just what falls in the lake that makes the lake level. And, I've forgotten where I brought this in about a little knowledge is a dangerous thing or something and turned it off that way. But he wouldn't give up, you couldn't knock him down. He was just going to sell his paper no matter what. In fact, the District Engineer told me never to stop and talk to him anymore. I used to stop and talk to him about the conditions. And the District Engineer tried that

one time and the next day he came out with an article and misquoted the District Engineer. And they sent it down to us, and he said, don't go and talk to the man, you can't trust him.

Int. Did they send you the papers regularly?

Walters No, we didn't get the papers regularly, but the dam-tenders would get them and cut out clippings and send them in.

Int. One last question, and then I will kind of let you be. Earlier, when we were talking about the way in which recreation policy began to develop, it occurred to me then to ask and I just didn't kind of get it in. How much, it almost sounded as if this was a national policy out of Washington or something and that the St. Paul office really didn't have much control over -

Walters I think that is right. It was a growing thing, and we had this land at each of the sites which we weren't really using. So the whole spirit changed, let's say when they got away from me. Well, let's use it. Actually, I wrote the first recreation plan for the Mississippi River, one of those assignments I had on the side and -

Int. And when would this have been?

Walters Oh, in the '40s sometime, in the '40s. Latter part of the '40s I guess. I've forgotten just when it was. Before I took over the locks and dams. But I had a fellow working for me, oh, what is his name? Anyway, he wanted everything done for conservation, fish and wildlife and so on. Do everything for them. He was always bitter that the Corps didn't take into consideration or give enough thought to taking care of those things. I said, well, you know, a 9-foot channel is built for navigation. That's number one. Now, we have got the locks and dams, and we ought to do whatever we can to improve things for wildlife. But you have to accept that's what's there, and then you start from there. You can't, say, take out the locks and dams or something because, they accuse us of ruining the fish or fishing and so on. As a matter of fact, I think there's much better fishing now because of the locks and dams. But it changed location. You couldn't go to the old fishing hole and fish anymore. They drifted out, and different types of fish went into the back areas above those dams. All kinds of fishing in there now.

Int. I understand that fishing is very good near the dams themselves.

Walters Well, down below.

Int. Right down below. You have to be real careful.

Walters Well, there again, they did something that to me was foolish here a few years ago. When the dams were first built, people got in there below the dams, and there were three ministers. Somewhere, I don't know where, was it 5 or 5A or where. But I think it was 5. And they got in, the boat was pulled right into the dam when it was discharging heavily, and they were dumped in the water. And I think one or two of them drowned. I am not sure if the three of them drowned or not.

Int. How awful.

Walters So, then they passed a rule that you can't get within 300 feet of the dam. Well, while I was in charge of the dams, I came up with an idea of putting up poles with lights on them across on each bank and one in-between. So that you could see, get a line, with two lights and see if you were up above or below. Oh, the judges wouldn't prosecute anyone because there was nothing to indicate that 300 foot limit. So I had them put these poles of lights on, so that when you are in there, you can see either the poles or the lights and the signs indicated this.

Int. That you were in a danger zone.

Walters Yes, that you were in a danger zone.

Int. Let me flip this.

Tape Two Side Two

Walters Some years ago they did away with that 300-foot limit. Then they had some more drownings, and I think they have gone back to -

Int. Some kind of warning.

Walters I am not sure. But that was an important thing, to my way of thinking. To keep people out of there.

Int. Of course, things must have changed a great deal. Something that, you said that in the years when you first started out there, one of the very important things in the Headwaters was guarding the family's privacy, whoever lived at the dams. And now, of course, it seems

like it is much more public place.

Walters Oh, it has changed completely.

Int. Was that change beginning when you were still there?
Or, could you see that?

Walters Well, there was some change, there at Leech. It meant more traffic passed right in front of the dam-tender's house. However, he was screened from that traffic by quite a heavy growth of pine trees. But, he didn't object to it, but it was traveled pretty late at night in and out of there. And undoubtedly disturbed the family. But now they don't have them living at the dams, so that eliminates that, you see. I say, Gull has them, and at Sandy they have them and I guess that is the only ones that have houses now.

Int. There is a house at Winnibigosh.

Walters Yes, there is a house, but I understand he lives in town, doesn't he?

Int. You know, I guess you are right. He lives in Bena. No, Deer River. That's right, because I just -

Walters I think there are only two houses left where they live in them.

Int. Did you have much to do with the houses or the care the care of the houses?

Walters Sure, we had to maintain everything. But I made them paint them themselves.

Int. Could they paint whatever colors they wanted?

Walters Oh, yes. You chose the paint, but you have to put it on. Because we didn't have any money, compared to what they have now. We were down to hardly being able to pay anything out at the end of the year. And we had a District Engineer that was down on me for some reason. And at the end of a fiscal year, about the end of it, the fellow in charge of finance came to me, and he said, they're calling a meeting and they're going to call on me and you're going to get the devil, because you have some money left in the Headwater Reservoir funds. I said, how come? Well, he said, we changed the overhead rate, and I charged more off to the locks and dams. So you have about \$1,000 or something like left in there. So he says, he's going to jump on you about that at this meeting. And that is the very first thing he said, Walters, you told me you didn't have any money in the Headwaters Reservoirs. I understand there

is \$1,000 there, how come? Well, I said, I understand they changed the overhead rate and it just appeared and I didn't know they were doing this. Well, what are you going to do with that money? I said, well, I guess we can buy those extra outboard motors you've been crying for. And, he says, Miss Murphy, can we do that? She was in charge of procurement. Yes, if we get the request in right away, I think we can do that. See that you do it and now get out of here, we don't need you in this meeting anymore, he says.

Int. Now that he had a good yelling and he got his outboards, huh?

Walters He was the only District Engineer I had trouble with, all the ones I've worked under. Don't record this.

Int. All right. I'll take it off. [Digression about trouble with District Engineer]

Int. What you said about having people paint the dwellings at the dam sites interested me, because the Corps has another consultant working on the damtenders' dwellings and doing some research on the officers' quarters and the dwellings. And since we just have this little bit, (of tape) I'd like to ask questions about your policies concerning the dwellings and officers quarters. And if people could paint their own colors and if they could have flower beds, or were there rules? I mean, did it have to be a certain color or something like that?

Walters No, there was no standard color. They could paint them any color they wanted.

Int. Outside and inside?

Walters No, the outside. We hired a contractor to paint the outsides. I think, in all cases as far as I can recall. I don't know whether we hired them; I think where they were stucco they painted the windows and things themselves. But inside, if they wanted a certain color, they could paint it. We furnished the paint, and they put it on themselves.

Int. I understand there were like rents and utilities and stuff and they paid.

Walters They paid for the utilities, and they had to pay rent. It wasn't awfully high, but it still was paying out rent. And that is why alot of them, they've done away with them, because no one wants to put the money in there and not have a house to move into when he retires, which is good. But the idea then was that like on the locks and dams, there were two

houses at each lock and dam, one for the lockmaster and his family and one for the assistant. So they'd be close by in case of an emergency, needed extra help or something happened, an accident happened, they would be close to the site. But that's done away with now. Houses are gone.

Int. Is there anything that I've kind of reminded you of that you would want to say, I mean, something that I didn't ask you that just is - ?

Walters I've spouted off here about so many things you will probably have to throw half the tape away.

Int. Oh, no, no.

Walters Oh, I'd get in a word. I was very careful in selecting damtenders. I got fellows that were energetic, because they are left alone. And I've found that if you are not energetic you will let things slide maybe - .

Int. How did you chose them or how did you -

Walters Oh, I'd interview them, and I'd get to know them. And liquor was taboo. Absolutely. Because I felt the damtender was the Corps of Engineers in that area. He was our representative, and if he wasn't a good representative of the Corps, then our name was mud. So that is one thing I tried to do, was pick good quality men for the jobs. I've been surprised to hear how much drinking some have done up there in more recent years. I think it's a disgrace when one of our men gets arrested for drunk driving and so on. But that's my feeling about it.

Int. When you were looking for damtenders, did you put ads in the local papers, or how did you find them?

Walters No. Mostly, it might be people that had worked for us at the site and were interested in the job and so on. Or pulled several out of the locks and dams. There was a Henry Dart, he was on construction at two or three of them. And after they were finished building here, he went down to Rock Island and got a job. Well then, I got an opening at Sandy, so I wrote to him and asked him if he wanted the job, and he came up. Happened to hit the coldest day of the winter when they got up there, but they still took the job. And then, Ike Kolb came up from No. 5. And when she [Mrs. Kolb] had to leave the little town where they were living down river, she cried, very unhappy to come up there. And after they had been there for a few years, we asked if they wanted to go to Dakota to another dam out there. Absolutely not. She wouldn't leave Sandy. You know where they live now.

Int. Yeah. And, they told me that story, too, so it's interesting. It is interesting when you get the same story from two different participants.

Walters Well, I tried to treat them fair and square. My, they paid them poorly, you know. I know when Carl Anderson was put on as damtender at Gull, they only paid him \$1200 a year and he had two boys that he was raising. And he had got a cow or two and put in a big garden and so on to make ends meet. And they jumped on me that he was using the property too much or some didn't think that was the way it should be, you know. Well, how do you expect him to live there? Low pay like that and not give him a chance to do something to help out. Well, they dropped the subject then.

Int. It is interesting that you should raise that, because I got the impression that the Corps discouraged people from having cows or gardens or that kind of thing in the postwar years. 'Cause when you look at the old maps you can see that people had barns and -

Walters Pre-war years. But the earlier was when I'm speaking of.

Int. So in the '30s, it was more common that people would be keeping cows.

Walters The highest pay was \$1680 there, those first years that I was up there, and then they charged, oh, \$15 - \$20 a month house rent.

[Requests tape off]

Int. Now, we were just talking about the officers' quarters off the tape, and I was telling you that some of the damtenders that I have talked to indicated that they thought the reason that the quarters finally shut down was that there had been abuses, that people used them in ways they oughten of and I wondered if you had any experience with that when you were - if you had problems.

Walters There was a lt. colonel and his wife went up to Winnibigosh and stayed a full month. And they insisted on the damtender taking them out fishing almost every day and be gone from early morning, right after breakfast 'til time to eat in the evening. And the damtender's wife would have to fix them lunch and coffee. And the one episode was they had poured a cup of coffee out for the wife, and a little bug flew down and lit in the coffee and she threw the whole cup of coffee away. And they only had a few cups of coffee for the

whole day. And he was very unhappy about her throwing that out. And then when they ended up, they had several bottles of beer left that they had split the payment for and the officer insisted that he pay them for their share of the beer that was left - the case of beer, and they also insisted that they do the washing for them. Their own family wash and, I guess they did at Winni.

And the next year they went to Gull and they said, you should do the washing, and she said no, I wash the sheets, pillow cases and the linen, but you will have to take care of your private washing. Oh yes, you will. Oh, no, I won't. Well, I am going to call the District Engineer and she said, there's the phone. So he called up the District Engineer, and the District Engineer, fortunately, agreed with the damtender. And they did take their wash into town to have done. But that is the measure and some of the abuse and the staying a whole month at the place. And like at Winni, you have to drive 15 miles into Deer River to go get meat, and they'd have to order special meats and that raised the cost of meals. They weren't paid very well for them, too much for them, to begin with.

I know, I got in the office one day and one officer, or the Chief Clerk called me in, and said, oh, come in Walters, glad you showed up. He said, I was just talking to the Captain here and he said he thought they having to pay too much for the meals at the Head-water Reservoirs. I said, oh, is that so? Yeah, you know, some of those couples they only served you hot dogs or something. And, I said well, that is in some places, but that is not many of them, and you don't stay there anyway. I said, otherwise I think the meals are excellent meals and the price certainly isn't too high for what you get. And he dropped the matter, and later the Chief Clerk thanked me for standing up for the dam-tenders. He thought a (indecipherable) they weren't overpaid at all for the meals they put out. Those are just an indication of some of the things that have happened.

Int. Do you remember when the quarters actually went out, I mean, when people couldn't go and stay with their families anymore?

Walters Well, I think it stopped by the wartime. I think, yeah.

Int. So families didn't go up after the war?

Walters Wait a minute, wait a minute now. Pettit. Yeah, I think that's right, I don't think we had any after the war at all.

Int. So, after the war it was just people like you who would be going up on trips then?

Walters Yeah, and I stayed there in the cottage many times. Once in a great while, we would go in the wintertime and they would have to heat it up just for that. And they would have to go and start the power in there 24 hours in advance because the walls would be so cold and things, it could be very uncomfortable. But generally speaking, they cut way down on the use of them.

Int. Do you remember, were they phased out before you left the Corps completely or -

Walters Oh, they were completely removed before I left the Corps.

Int. Oh, really, so it was the '60s not the '70s when those officers quarters went out.

Walters Oh, yes, they were out before then.

Int. Well, we will look in a different place then. We have been looking in the wrong decade. One of the problems, and you can probably appreciate this having worked for the Corps. They archive everything pretty far away now, and so I am asking things that people who worked there know. But you can't find the records, if you're coming in from the outside, because so much stuff has been shipped away to Washington or St. Louis or to Kansas City to archives. Sometimes John Anfinson, the guy who works with the history in the Corps office, and I and other consultants who work with him can't find the answers in the St. Paul office. We will find sometimes when we talk with somebody on tape or -

Walters Carl Anderson can probably tell you when the house at Pokegama - . We cut that house down; it was a big two-story house. We cut that down to a one story house, and then that has been moved out, and I don't know what happened to the - whether - .

Int. They didn't move them off apparently; they sold them and moved them off the property, 'cause I have been told that several are, you know, people who lived around had bought them and moved them someplace. OK.

Walters The one at Leech, I really don't know -

Int. That is somewhere around the lake I am told. I don't know exactly where. [This is a reference to officers' quarters, not the damtenders dwelling, still standing at Leech as of February 1988.]

Walters It might be. It was a well built building.

Int. Could people have flower gardens and things like that if they wanted? Were there any rules about -

Walters Well, I didn't have any rules. But there is a fellow who was at Gull and I got up there one day and he said here, how do you like my flower bed? And right where you drive in around the house, here was this great big thing, oh, 18 feet in diameter or something. And I said, well, you've got it there, but I said, well, you are going to have to maintain it. It is a problem to keep them up, and that's why I don't favor them too much, because you let them go, and they get to look sloppy. Well, he was an ex-Army man, and he had this flower bed and he maintained it. He wasn't there too awfully long 'til he moved up to Winni and I guess he put some in up there. But they finally did away with the flower bed at Gull because it was too much work to keep up. You got to maintain them. I didn't give them any rules about not this or not that, but you got to keep up the place neat. That was our understanding.

Int. Were there any other rules, or just, I mean you mentioned -

Walters No liquor.

Int. Yes, you mentioned no liquor and that was your rule.

Walters Well, it wasn't. You just didn't come out with a rule, but they knew that I didn't favor it. And I picked people that didn't drink, anyway, as far as I knew.

Int. Could people go to town and have a drink? Did you mind that?

Walters Oh, that's alright.

Int. You just didn't want people to keep liquor at the place.

Walters Don't get drunk, I mean, I didn't - no rules at all about that. But there was a rule issued, I guess, that there shouldn't be liquor in those cottages for visitors. And we had a Head Engineer, he didn't listen

to those rules. And he used to drink up there, they told me. When he stayed up there, he didn't stay often. But it turned out he was almost a habitual drinker, and his wife was, too. And I didn't know that until, I guess, shortly before she died. But I remember one time, we were out at White Rock Dam, and there was only good place in Wheaton to eat. And he was with me one day and it was time to eat and I said, let's go in the Farmers' Cafe. I'm not going in there. Well, the story was he had gone hunting out there with someone - you aren't recording this are you? Well, you don't want this.

Int. Let me do it anyway. These stories really do help. Honest.

Walters He went hunting out there, and they went into eat and put a bottle on the table for them to drink. The waitress came over and said, it is against the rule to have a bottle on the table, put it down out of sight. So, she came back a little later and here was the bottle on the table. So she said, you will have to move it, or I will tell Mr. Farmer about it. Well, tell him if you want to, I guess, he retorted or something. Farmer came out and put the bottle down. So after that, no going in there to eat, and it was the only good place in town to eat. So it was a handicap for me when he was along.

Int. Do you think that the sensitivity about alcohol, I was raised in the military, so I am aware that there is a lot of alcoholism in the service. And there is also a lot of alcohol problems on Indian reservations. Do you think that that contributed to the sensitivities about alcohol in the Headwaters, or is it just coincidence?

Walters I guess it is my own personal feeling, as far as I was concerned. I guess there was that rule about no drinking in the cottages, there was not supposed to be -

Int. That was a Corps rule, not a Headwaters rule?

Walters The Headwater reservoirs are the only places they had housing like that. Oh, I don't know, I don't object to drinking, you know. I don't want damtenders going around drunk, being arrested for drunk driving and so on, because they are the Corps to me up there. And I talked to them along that line. I said, I want you to be gentlemen, and most of them you didn't have to because they were gentlemen, a credit to the Corps. I'm proud of the Corps. I'm glad I worked for the Corps.

Int. I can imagine.

Walters I was there almost 36 years, April 17, 1932 'til the end of December '65. So, I have been retired for 22 years now. That's a lot of time. I might be good for another 4 or 5, or so?

Appendix B/Scope of Work
C/v
Project Correspondence

SCOPE OF WORK
ORAL HISTORY: MISSISSIPPI RIVER HEADWATERS RESERVOIRS

1.00 INTRODUCTION

1.01 The Contractor will undertake an oral history investigation of the Mississippi River Headwaters Reservoirs (Winnibigoshish, Leech Lake, Pokegama, Pine River, and Gull Lake) in order to complete the District's oral history program on the Headwaters and to preserve important information not contained in or poorly detailed in written documents. Corps of Engineers personnel (past or present) who are best able to fulfill this objective will be interviewed, as will two non-Corps individuals familiar with the Headwaters project.

1.02. This investigation partially fulfills the requirements of Environmental Regulation (ER) 870-1-1. This regulation establishes the general responsibilities and procedures governing historical programs of field operating activities. Specifically, it states that each Commander will establish an oral history program to conduct interviews with as broad a spectrum of the agency's active and retired personnel as possible.

2.00 PROJECT DESCRIPTION

2.01 The five Headwaters Reservoirs on the Mississippi River north of Brainerd, Minnesota, are the focus of this study. Winnibigoshish, Leech Lake, Pokegama, Pine River, and Gull Lake Reservoirs were created by the Corps of Engineers in the 1880s and have served many functions over the last 100 years. This study hopes to increase the public's knowledge about the importance of these reservoirs to the history of the Upper Mississippi River and Minnesota.

2.02 This oral history contract will complete the District's oral history study on the development of recreation at the Headwaters Reservoirs. Most of the former dam tenders and two of their wives were interviewed in the pilot oral history project. This contract will complete the dam tenders interviews, record the oral history of the development of recreation from the District Office perspective, and capture the impressions of two non-Corps individuals familiar with the Headwaters project. Through a synthesis with information gained from the pilot study, this contract will complete the oral history of recreation development in the Headwaters.

2.03 Most of the oral interview candidates have been identified in the District's pilot oral history study of the Headwaters. These individuals include Henry L. Sharp, Irvin Seelye, J. Wesley Walters, Owen Emsweiler, Jim Von Lorenz, Jim Ruyak, Dennis Cin, and Walter Hermerding. Of these individuals, Sharp and Seelye will be interviewed, unless they are unavailable or unwilling; two of the remaining six will also be interviewed under this contract. In addition, two non-Corps individuals knowledgeable about the Headwaters (either from the Indian community or the resort

industry) should be interviewed. Thus, the contract calls for six interviews.

3.00 DEFINITIONS

3.01 For the purposes of this study, the oral history investigation will include a literature review of works identified in the pilot oral history study.

3.02 "Literature review" is defined as the review and evaluation of the pertinent literature and records examined under section 3.01 of this scope of work. The purpose of the literature review is to familiarize the contractor with the history of the Headwaters project.

3.03 "Oral history" is defined as the interviewing of relevant Corps personnel to complement the written record. Cassette tapes and typed transcripts of the interviews are required. The typed transcripts will be edited for accuracy, rather than being left verbatim.

4.00 PERFORMANCE SPECIFICATIONS

4.01 The Contractor's work will be subject to the supervision, review, and approval of the Contracting Officer's representative.

4.02 The Contractor will provide all materials and equipment necessary to perform the required services expeditiously.

4.03 If requested, a letter of introduction from the St. Paul District will be provided to explain the project purposes and request the cooperation of the interviewees. Where an interviewee denies permission for an interview, the Contractor must immediately notify the Contracting Officer's representative and discuss alternate individuals to be interviewed.

4.04 The Contractor must keep standard records that include cassette tapes, field notes and maps, and photographs.

5.00 GENERAL REPORT REQUIREMENTS

5.01 The Contractor will submit the following documents, described in this section and Section 6.00: a draft contract report, a final contract report, and a popular report.

5.02 The draft contract report will include the edited transcripts of the interviews and an assessment of the new and important information learned from the oral histories. It will detail the approach, methods, and results of the investigation. It will synthesize the new information with the pilot oral history to provide a coherent oral history of 1) the shift to recreation management at the Headwaters Reservoirs, 2) how the lives of the individuals who worked at the reservoirs changed as a result, and 3) how the change affected the greater Headwaters community in the vicinity of the reservoirs. The draft contract report will be submitted to the Contracting

Officer's representative, who will review it and forward it to other appropriate agencies for review. Comments will be returned to the Contractor, who will make the necessary revisions and submit the final contract report.

5.03 The final contract report will incorporate the comments of the Contracting Officer's representative.

5.04 The Contractor's field notes will include legible copies of important notes and records kept during the investigation.

5.05 The Contractor's draft and final reports will include the following sections, as appropriate to the study. The length of each section depends on the level of detail required of the study and the amount of information available. The reports should be as concise as possible, yet provide all the information needed for evaluating and managing the project and for future reference.

a. Title page: The title page will provide the following information: the type of study; the project name and location (county and State); the date of the report; the Contractor's name; the contract number; the name of the author(s) and/or Principal Investigator; the signature of the Principal Investigator; and the agency for which the report is being prepared.

b. Management summary: This section will provide a concise summary of the study, containing all the information needed for management of the project. This information will include the reason the work was undertaken, who the sponsor was, a brief summary of the scope of work and budget, a summary of the field work and editing procedures, the limitations of the study, the results, the significance of the results, recommendations for further work, and the repository for records.

c. Table of contents

d. List of figures

e. List of plates

f. Introduction: This section will identify the sponsors (Corps of Engineers) and their reason for the study and present an overview of the study. It will also define the location and boundaries of the study area (using regional and area-specific maps); define the study area within its regional cultural and environmental context; reference the scope of work; identify the institution that did the work and the number of people and person-days/hours involved; give the dates when the various phases of the work were completed; identify the repository of records; and provide a brief outline of the report and an overview of its major goals.

g. Theoretical and methodological overview: This section will state the goals of the sponsor and the researcher, the theoretical and

methodological orientation of the study, and the research strategies that were applied to achieve the goals.

h. Research and analysis methods: This section will explain the methods employed and the reasons for selecting them. It will also describe and justify the specific analytical methods used and discuss limitations or problems with the analysis.

i. Recommendations: This section will recommend any further work deemed necessary.

j. References: This section will provide bibliographic references for every publication cited in the report. References not cited in the report may be listed in a separate "Additional References" section.

k. Appendix: This section will include the Scope of Work, resumes of project personnel, copies of all correspondence relating to the study, and any other pertinent information referenced in the text.

l. Figures: The location of all historic sites and other features discussed in the text will be shown on a legibly photocopied USGS map bound into the report.

5.06 A cover letter submitted with the final contract report will include the project budget.

5.07 The Contractor will submit to the Contracting Officer's representative the negatives for all photographs that appear in the final report.

5.08 The popular report will be a brief summary of the study written for the general public. It will be submitted with the draft report, reviewed by the Contracting Officer's representative and, if necessary, revised before resubmission with the final contract report. The writing style should be clear, avoiding the use of technical terms wherever possible; if such terms are used, they should be clearly explained. This report should emphasize the general results of the study and its significance in terms of historic cultural development, rather than detailing methods or descriptive information. The use of illustrations is highly recommended. At the Contractor's request, examples of well-written popular reports can be supplied by the Contracting Officer's representative.

6.00 REPORT FORMATS

6.01 There are no format requirements for the written notes; however, they must be legible. If the original handwritten notes are illegible, they should be typed. All notes and the original cassette tapes will be submitted to the Contracting Officer's representative along with the final report.

6.02 Formats for the draft and final reports are as follows:

a. The Contractor will present information in whatever textual, tabular, or graphic forms are most effective for communicating it.

b. The draft and final reports will be divided into easily discernible chapters, with appropriate page separations and headings.

c. The report text will be typed, single-spaced (the draft report should be space-and-one-half or double-spaced), on good quality bond paper, 8.5 inches by 11.0 inches, with 1.5-inch binding and bottom margins and 1-inch top and outer margins, and may be printed on both sides of the paper. All pages will be numbered consecutively, including plates, figures, tables, and appendixes.

d. All illustrations must be clear, legible, self-explanatory, and of sufficiently high quality to be reproduced easily by standard xerographic equipment, and will have margins as defined above. All maps must be labeled with a caption/description, a north arrow, a scale bar, township and range, map size and dates, and map source (e.g., the USGS quad name or published source). All photographs or drawings should be clear, distinct prints or copies with captions and a bar scale.

6.03 The popular report should follow the basic format requirements specified in Sections 6.02 c. and d.

7.00 MATERIALS PROVIDED

7.01 The Contracting Officer's representative will furnish the Contractor with access to any publications, records, maps, or photographs that are on file at the St. Paul District headquarters.

8.00 SUBMITTALS

8.01 The Contractor will submit reports according to the following schedules:

a. Draft contract report: Three copies of the draft contract report will be submitted no later than 1 March 1988. The draft contract report will be reviewed by the Corps of Engineers, the Corps Headwaters staff, and one other agency. The draft contract report will be submitted according to the report and contract specifications outlined in this scope of work.

b. Project field notes: One legible copy of all the project field notes will be submitted with the draft contract report.

c. Final contract report: The original and seven copies of the final report will be submitted 60 days after the Contractor receives the Corps of Engineers comments on the draft report. The final report will incorporate all the comments made on the draft report.

d. Popular report: Three copies of the popular report will be submitted for review with the draft contract report. The original and 10 copies will be submitted with the final contract report, incorporating comments made by the Contracting Officer's representative.

9.00 CONDITIONS

9.01 Failure of the Contractor to fulfill the requirements of this Scope of Work will result in rejection of the Contractor's report and/or termination of the contract.

9.02 Neither the Contractor nor the Contractor's shall release any sketch, photograph, report, or other materials of any nature obtained or prepared under the contract without specific written approval of the Contracting Officer's representative prior to the acceptance of the final report by the Government. **Dissemination of survey results** through papers at professional meetings and publication in professional journals is encouraged. However, professional discretion should be used in releasing information on site locations where publication could result in damage to cultural resources.

9.03 All materials, documents, collections, notes, forms, maps, etc., that have been produced or acquired in any manner for use in the completion of this contract shall be made available to the Contracting Officer's representative upon request.

9.04 Principal investigators will be responsible for the validity of **material** presented in their reports. In the event of controversy or court challenge, the principal investigator(s) will be placed under separate contract to testify on behalf of the Government in support of the findings presented in their reports.

9.05 The Contractor will be responsible for adhering to all State laws and procedures regarding the **treatment and disposition of human skeletal remains**. Any human remains recovered will be treated with respect and will not be placed on public display.

NAME: Jo Blatti

ADDRESS: 402 5th Avenue S.E.
Waseca, MN 56093
507/835-7107

HISTORY AFIELD
P.O. Box 704
Owatonna, MN 55060

EDUCATION: A.A. Stephens College, Columbia, Missouri, 1966
B.A. Macalester College, St. Paul, Minnesota, 1968
M.A. American Studies, State University of New York at
Buffalo, 1975

FIELDS OF INTEREST: American social and cultural history; interpretive exhibitions, media and events in museums and related institutions; oral history

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

*Principal, HISTORY AFIELD, Owatonna, MN, Summer 1986-

A founding member in consulting firm offering creative and technical services to museums and other programming institutions, Upper Midwest and nationally. Initiate client contacts, recruit associates, develop marketing, public relations, contracts and budgets, participate as practicing historian in firm's projects, oversight for development and direction of firm.

*Director of Research and Interpretation, Minnesota Agricultural Interpretive Center, Waseca, MN, June 1985-July 1986

Overall responsibilities included development, direction, budgeting of interpretive program for 19th and 20th century farmsteads plus associated structures; work with executive director and board on institutional master plan; supervision of interpretive staff and collections; realization of physical sites, exhibitions and visitor programs; coordination with public relations, development and operations staff plus community volunteers.

*Program Officer, New York Council for the Humanities (New York City and Buffalo), November 1978-May 1985

Responsibilities for proposal development and evaluation public humanities projects, liaison with statewide constituents, editing Council publications. In the area of program development, special interests and responsibilities included historical subjects, interpretive exhibitions and documentary media. Special projects included organization of PAST MEETS PRESENT, a national forum on historic interpretation in museums and other public sites, in New York City in October 1984, the Sleepy Hollow Conference on Interpretation in Outdoor Museums in 1982.

*Producer, Historical projects, WBFO-FM, Buffalo, NY, January 1976-September 1978

"The Buffalo Social History Project," a series of 14 specials on aspects of work, education and immigration in 19th and 20th century Buffalo, was funded by the NEH, 1976-77. "The American Dream," 8 one-hour specials exploring ideas about success, social and economic equality, was funded by the New York Council for the Humanities, 1977-78. Both public radio series featured oral history interviews, dramatic adaptations of diaries, newspapers and other primary source materials, vintage fiction and music; portions broadcast nationally through NPR. Responsibilities as producer included research, design, fund-raising, liaison with academic collaborators, interviewing, scripting, editing, supervision of technical assistants.

*Part-time producer and administrator, WBFO-FM, 1972-1975

As administrative assistant to general manager, drafted reports on station programming and operations for State University of New York management, assisted with fund-raising and day-to-day office affairs. As producer, programmed and announced weekly classical music show, prepared special features, live and taped, for cultural and public affairs programs, 3rd class FCC license. Special projects included "The Lower West Side, Buffalo, New York" (1975); "Working in Steel" (1975).

*Manager, Falconer Books, Inc., Buffalo, NY, 1968-1972

RELATED

ACTIVITIES:

Board of Directors, Minnesota Independent Scholars Forum, 1988 -

Nominating Committee, Oral History Association, 1987 -

Member, Program Committee, Oral History Association, 1987 Annual Meeting, St. Paul

Editor and contributor, PAST MEETS PRESENT, a collection of essays on historic interpretation for public audiences, Smithsonian Institution Press, 1987. (Sabbatical leave for this project, January-March 1985, funded through a grant from the L.J. Skaggs and Mary C. Skaggs Foundation.)

Panelist, Adult and Public Use, Study Center for American Art, Metropolitan Museum of Art, March 1985

Contributing editor for media and public history Oral History Review, 1984-

Editor, "Selected Proceedings Sleepy Hollow Conference on Historic Interpretation at Outdoor Museums and Historic Sites," 1983. (Joint publication New York Council for the Humanities, Sleepy Hollow Restorations, Gallery Association of New York)

New York State Council on the Arts Production Grant (Media Arts Division) for radio documentary on F.X. Matt Brewing Company in Utica, NY, December 1982

"I Don't Want To Play in Your Yard"
Review of the movie "Reds" in Radical History (Fall 1982)

SITES Seminar on Exhibition Interpretation, Smithsonian
Institution, Washington, D.C., November 1981

Guest panelist, Museum Aid Division, New York State Council on the
Arts, December 1980

Field reviewer, Museum Aid Division, New York State Council on the
Arts, 1979

Social history consultant, National Public Radio, Washington, D.C.,
Fall/Winter 1978 - 1979

Oral history consultant, Milwaukee Humanities Program, University
of Wisconsin - Milwaukee, Spring 1978

Member, Planning Group, New York State Conference on Community
History (May 1978)

Outside evaluator, Rochester Genesee Valley History Project, pilot
project in the uses of local historical materials in high school
and college curricula and community, museum and media programs 1977
- 1978

Contributor, "Down and Out in America," cover story New York
Times Magazine, February 9, 1978

Founding member, Buffalo Community Studies Group (Executive
Committee, 1974 - 1979)

Course design and teaching, SUNY/Buffalo, American Studies under-
graduate core course, "Patterns in American Cultural Development,"
1973 - 1974.

PRESENTATIONS: Association for Living Historical Farms and Agricultural Museums
Ann Arbor, Michigan
June 1987
Moderator, Panel on Academic Goals and Museum Programs

Oral History Association of Minnesota
St. Paul, Minnesota
February 1987
Leader, Advanced Workshop, "The Project Approach to Oral History"

American Historical Association Annual Meeting
Chicago, Illinois
December 1986
Comment, "Scholars and the Media"

Oral History Association Annual Meeting
Long Beach, California
October 1986
Panelist, "Summing Up the Transformation of the West"

Midwest Archives Conference
Hudson, Wisconsin
October 1986
Chair and comment, "After the Interview: Using Oral History"

American Association of Museums Annual Meeting
Washington, D.C.
June 1984
Panelist, "History Museums and Interpretation"

Sixth Berkshire Conference on the History of Women
Smith College
June 1984
Chair and comment, "Not Just Another Pretty Dress"

NYU Graduate Program in Public History
December 1983
Guest lecturer, "Public History and the Media"

American Studies Association
Biennial Convention, Philadelphia
November 1983
Chair and comment, "Social Space in Historical Perspective: New Approaches and Methods"

Seneca Falls Women's History Conference
Seneca Falls, NY
July 1982
Presenter, "Women and Work"

NEH Summer Seminar, "Historians, Universities and Communities"
Cornell University
July 1982
Guest scholar, "Public Presentation of Historical Research"

NYU Graduate Program in Public History
April 1982
Guest lecturer, "Oral History and Community History"

National Meeting of State Humanities Programs
Indianapolis
November 1980
Presenter, Workshop on Radio Projects

Organization of American Historians Annual Meeting
San Francisco
April 1980
Commentator, "The Public Perception of History"

Oral History Colloquium
East Lansing, Michigan
October 1979
Presenter, "Oral History on the Air"

Humanities Media Workshop

University of Delaware

May 1979

Presenter, Session on Humanities Programming for Radio

Empire State College Conference, The Growth and Development of an
American City: Buffalo

February 1977

"Using Oral History", panelist and workshop leader

ORGANIZATIONAL

MEMBERSHIPS: American Association for State and Local History
American Studies Association
Oral History Association
Organization of American Historians



HISTORY AFIELD

February 29, 1988

Carl A. Anderson
825 Summit #908
Minneapolis, MN 55403

Dear Mr. Anderson:

Thank you for speaking with me on February 26th concerning your experiences with the Corps of Engineers projects in the Mississippi Headwaters region. This oral history series is doing much to extend knowledge about past practices and on-the-job experiences of Corps employees.

I am likely to be contacting you by telephone as we transcribe the interview; there are sometimes questions about names and spellings on the printed page.

Thank you again for sharing your thoughts in this St. Paul Corps of Engineers oral history project. It was a pleasure to meet you. With very best wishes for your spring plantings -

Jo Blatti
Oral History Consultant
St. Paul District,
Corps of Engineers



HISTORY AFIELD

December 22, 1987

LaVain H. Staley
Box 764
Federal Dam, MN 56641

Dear Mr. Staley:

Thank you for speaking with me on December 12th concerning your experiences with the Corps of Engineers projects in the Mississippi Headwaters region. These oral history tapes are extending knowledge of past practices and community relations, particularly in the area of public recreation at the Headwaters dams.

I may be getting back to you by telephone next month as we transcribe the tapes; there are sometimes questions about names and spellings on the printed page.

Thank you again for sharing your reflections with the St. Paul Corps of Engineers oral history project. With very best wishes for the holiday season,

Jo Blatti
Oral History Consultant,
St. Paul District,
Corps of Engineers



HISTORY AFIELD

December 22, 1987

Warren D. Bridge
P.O. Box 101
Federal Dam, MN 56641

Dear Mr. Bridge:

Thank you for speaking with me on December 16th concerning your experiences with the Corps of Engineers projects in the Mississippi Headwaters region. These oral history tapes are extending knowledge of past practices and community relations, particularly in the area of public recreation at the Headwaters dams.

I may be getting back to you by telephone next month as we transcribe the tapes; there are sometimes questions about names and spellings on the printed page.

Thank you again for sharing your reflections with the St. Paul Corps of Engineers oral history project. With very best wishes for the holiday season,

Jo Blatti
Oral History Consultant,
St. Paul District,
Corps of Engineers

P.S. Will you and Mrs. Bridge please relay my greetings to the Hendersons and LeRoy Campbell? I got so close to Boy River, but was too tightly scheduled to pay a call.



HISTORY AFIELD

December 22, 1987

James D. Ruyak
Route 1, Box 267
Remer, MN 56672

Dear Jim:

Thank you for speaking with me on December 16th concerning your experiences with the Corps of Engineers projects in the Mississippi Headwaters region. These oral history tapes are extending knowledge of past practices and community relations, particularly in the area of public recreation at the Headwaters dams.

I may be getting back to you by telephone next month as we transcribe the tapes; there are sometimes questions about names and spellings on the printed page.

Thank you again for sharing your reflections with the St. Paul Corps of Engineers oral history project. With very best wishes for the holiday season,

Jo Blatti
Oral History Consultant,
St. Paul District,
Corps of Engineers

p.s. Thanks again for all your courtesies
to a visiting researcher + the vice !



HISTORY AFIELD

December 22, 1987

James T. von Lorenz
4332 Brookside Avenue
Minneapolis, MN 55436

Dear Mr. von Lorenz:

Thank you for speaking with me on December 10th concerning your experiences with the Corps of Engineers projects in the Mississippi Headwaters region. These oral history tapes are extending knowledge of past practices and community relations, particularly in the area of public recreation at the Headwaters dams.

I may be getting back to you by telephone next month as we transcribe the tapes; there are sometimes questions about names and spellings on the printed page.

Thank you again for sharing your reflections with the St. Paul Corps of Engineers oral history project. With very best wishes for the holiday season,

Jo Blatti
Oral History Consultant,
St. Paul District,
Corps of Engineers



HISTORY AFIELD

December 22, 1987

J. Wesley Walters
1288 No. Victoria
St. Paul, MN 55117

Dear Mr. Walters:

Thank you for speaking with me on December 8th concerning your experiences with the Corps of Engineers projects in the Mississippi Headwaters region. These oral history tapes are extending knowledge of past practices and community relations, particularly in the area of public recreation at the Headwaters dams.

I may be getting back to you by telephone next month as we transcribe the tapes; there are sometimes questions about names and spellings on the printed page.

Thank you again for sharing your reflections with the St. Paul Corps of Engineers oral history project. With very best wishes for the holiday season,

Jo Blatti
Oral History Consultant,
St. Paul District,
Corps of Engineers

P.S. Several people mentioned Carl Anderson to me up in the Headwaters last week after you and Mrs. Walters had. We are talking with the Corps about additional interview leads now.



HISTORY AFIELD

December 22, 1987

Irving L. Seelye
P.O. Box 011
Bena, MN 56626

Dear Irv Seelye:

Thank you for speaking with me on December 14th concerning your experiences with the Corps of Engineers projects in the Mississippi Headwaters region. These oral history tapes are extending knowledge of past practices and community relations, particularly in the area of public recreation at the Headwaters dams.

I may be getting back to you by telephone next month as we transcribe the tapes; there are sometimes questions about names and spellings on the printed page.

Thank you again for sharing your reflections with the St. Paul Corps of Engineers oral history project. With very best wishes for the holiday season, and for your retirement —

Jo Blatti
Oral History Consultant,
St. Paul District,
Corps of Engineers



HISTORY AFIELD

December 22, 1987

Mert Lego
Federal Dam, MN 56641

Dear Mert:

Thank you for speaking with me on December 15th concerning your experiences with the Corps of Engineers projects in the Mississippi Headwaters region. These oral history tapes are extending knowledge of past practices and community relations, particularly in the area of public recreation at the Headwaters dams.

I may be getting back to you by telephone next month as we transcribe the tapes; there are sometimes questions about names and spellings on the printed page.

Thank you again for sharing your reflections with the St. Paul Corps of Engineers oral history project. With very best wishes for the holiday season,

Jo Blatti
Oral History Consultant,
St. Paul District,
Corps of Engineers

Interview Schedule

St. Paul District Corps of Engineers Mississippi Headwaters Informants

I. General biographical info

- Are you a native of Headwater region?
- If not, how come to it
- Family background
- Work experience and skills
- Interest in outdoors, hunting, fishing
- Any contact with resorts, fishing in the area as youngster?

II. How came to Corps of Engineers

- Engineering and technical skills?
- Veteran status important?
- Home, family, friendship connections?
- Fringe benefits and retirement a factor?
- How old were you? Year?

III. Experience as dam-tender

- Typical day's routine - winter and summer
- Typical staffing pattern - winter and summer
- Favorite tasks? Any you didn't care for?
- Do you remember early wages and salaries?
- Describe dwelling and outbuilding at dam
- Wife and family on site? Summer only, year round?
- Family's response to housing facility. Enjoy? Any negatives?
Any special rules associated with Corps housing?
- Did you pay rent?
- Did you like living and working at same site? Any different responses among family members?

- Did dam seem remote in terms of shopping, schooling, visiting?
- Were the dam-tender's dwellings only houses on-site? Always available? Any hassles?

IV. Water resources/recreation

- Especially memorable events at your dam - flood, dam breaks or scares, boating hazards, blizzards?
- Public use of lake, hikers, hunters, vacation homes, resorts 1950's, 1960's?
- Public comment, concern about dam, water levels, public access 1950's, 1960's?
- Special groups - fishing guides, Leech Lake Chippewa - voice concerns?
- How did dam-tenders keep in touch, discuss concerns, given distance between Headwaters and St. Paul Office?
- How often did St. Paul people visit you?
- How often did you visit St. Paul office?
- How often did dam-tenders get together in Headwaters? Where? Was there always a Remers office?
- How would you describe the change from dams and water levels to emphasis on picnic grounds, camping?
- When did you become aware of changing policy toward recreation within the Corps?
- How become aware? A meeting, memo, your own observation?
- Any particular individuals you'd single out as important to recreation facilities development - Headwaters or St. Paul?
- How would you describe their contributions?

V. Development of recreation facilities

- What were the first recreation facilities at your dam-site?
 - when built?
 - describe?
 - who designed? and built?
- What else was built? How decide what was next?
- Do you remember 1st visitors? Year? Can you describe?
- Would you describe recreational development as
 - gradual?
 - fast-paced?
- How about visitation patterns? Slow growth or fast?
- Did visitors match facilities? More of one than the other?
- Did it, does it ever get crowded at the damsites?
- What happened to dam-tending activities as recreation became more important?
- To what extent did recreation bring new duties for you and staff?
Describe.....
- Did life change in other ways?
- Did you notice these changes as being hard for Headwaters people in any way? Describe?
- Now there are rangers and park technicians and other sorts of jobs that didn't exist when you started at the Headwaters. Do you remember when these new staff members began to appear?
Welcome? New kids on the block?
- Any archaeological digs on your site? How identified? What was I like to be around the digs for
you?

staff?

family?

public?

- Were there other buildings or sites of historical/cultural interest at your dam site?

- Do you know anything about dam-tenders who served before you at the Headwaters dams? About life in the Corps then?

- Do you have a personal philosophy regarding the work you did with dams and people and water?

Would you share?

- Is there anything you'd like to add??

Note: This is an ambitious interview schedule. However, no individual informant is expected to "answer" in all categories. Oral history informants tend to remember or concentrate on particular areas of their interest. We are likely to gather a 'mosaic' which addresses most of these general categories with varying emphases and point of view.